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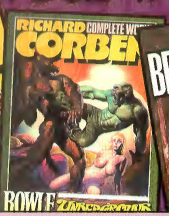

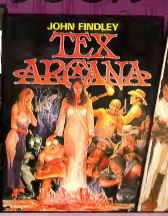

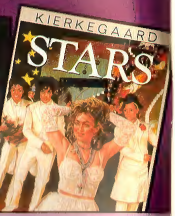

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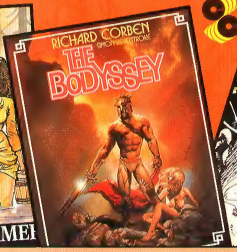

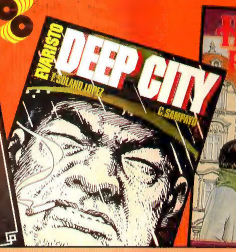

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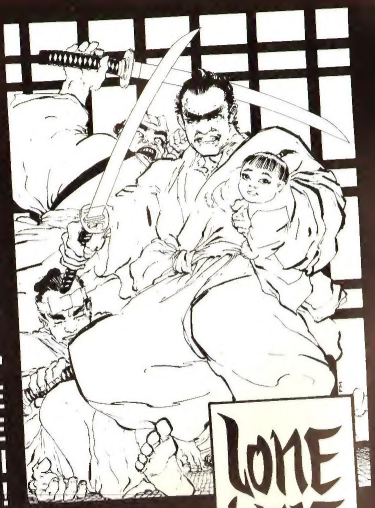

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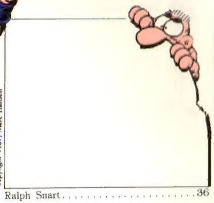

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In his hidden laboratory, Dr. Z reveals and unleashes his dreadful secret, preparing for the doom of us all! But first he must extract his revenge from his past enemies, Dr. Eckman Schrift and Trevor Stratton. In a botched attempted murder, Dr. Z inadvertantly transforms Stratton into Reactoman but later succeeds in kidnapping Schrift's niece, Clare.
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Publisher and Editor In Chief

SCOTT WILLIAMSON
Art Director

BRIAN SCHLESINGER
Advertising Manager

BRANDON TWINE
Editorial Assistance

BETH BRESSEN
BOB CANINO
Proofreading

SPENCER ROSENGARTEN
Researcher

Advertising information is available on request from:
Paragon Q Publishing
P.O. Box 1146
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point blank

March is a busy month for **Four Color** not to imply that January and February were particularly slow). Half the staff is packing their suntan lotion, Ray-bans and typewriters to open up Paragon Q South, in Orlando. Actually, we are attending a tradeshow for a few days to promote the magazine to retailers. While this is occurring, the rest of our staff will be producing a special advertising campaign to attract subscribers. Somewhere in the midst of all this we have an April issue to deliver to our printer.

There is a misconception amongst comic fans that we do all of this entirely out of love. The we, in this instance, includes the entire comics industry, not just Paragon Q. Not to burst any big bubbles, but this is not entirely true.

Four Color represents to us, our slice of the American pie. On completing our educations we were offered several choices that boiled down to either working for someone else or taking a crack at working for ourselves. Rather than channel our creative energies into someone else's product, we decided to form Paragon Q and stick our necks out on the table.

Sure, we chose the comics industry to start off with because we love the medium. This is often the fantasy of every comic-loving reader at one time or another. However, once out of school we faced the realistic need to earn a living. **Four Color** represents a synthesis of interest and capitalism. If there was no money to be made in the industry, you wouldn't be reading this editorial right now.

Unless we are mistaken, this is also the case for many other comics publishers. While we are sure the people at First and Comico are involved in the industry out of love, they are also involved out of a need to earn a living. This is not to suggest greed, rather it is the reality of having to pay the bills.

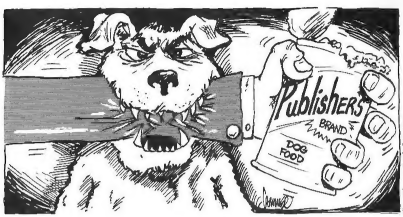

Illustration By Frank Cammuso

Earning a living in this industry as a publisher is often a challenge. The basic process is that we produce and ship the product to a dozen or so distributors who then dispatch them down to their retail accounts (mostly comic stores). The bottom line to this system is that **we** completely generate the magazine but only realize 37% of the total cover price of each issue. Distributors usually get around 20% of the cover price and retailers around 40%.

We ship **Four Color** to distributors under a system of good faith, namely that they will pay us in full one month after they receive an issue. It is difficult enough for us to earn a living without having to add on the poor business practices of some distributors. Specifically, many distributors pay their bills months late, if at all. Just recently, several distributors have sent letters stating that they are experiencing cash flow problems and will not be paying their debts in the near future. Even worse, if some of these distributors go bankrupt, we will never see a penny.

What this translates to in the broadest terms is bad business practices on the distributor/retail level. When a distributor orders and sells a title, he has a moral and legal obligation to pay for it. Unfortunately, in this industry, that is not happening and many fine publishers are forced to fall by the wayside.

We are one of the lucky publishers in that we have been able to ride this storm so far. Others, such as **Cerebus** publisher/storyteller Dave Sim, are able to survive by bypassing the normal distribution process. Sim is selling his "High Society" compilation by mail orders only, much to the chagrin of distributors and retailers who will not earn a penny off this fine product.

We don't intend this editorial as a generalization of all comics-oriented distributors. Obviously, they are not all blood-sucking leeches. However, the number of well run distributors doing business can be counted on one hand.

We consider ourselves publishers first and foremost. This means we can explore, in magazine format, our interests outside the comics industry. It would be extremely unfortunate to us to have to leave the comics medium behind. Unless the distributors improve their business practices, this industry will lose many fine publications, **Four Color Magazine** included. Let's hope this practice of distributors biting the hands that feed them won't result in the death of direct-sales distribution altogether.

David Caruba
Brandon Twine
February, 1987

By Tom Heintjes

up front

In **The Comics Journal** #108, a letter appeared that decried moral degeneracy in comic books. The correspondent's means to purge comics of this decay was the Committee to Crush Corruption in Comics (presumably, he was referring to the fictitious aspects of the industry). This letter was followed by a reply from the **Journal's** editor, Gary Groth: "Homosexuality? Premarital sex? Hostility toward the New Right? Where will this moral degeneracy end? . . . Can't something be done about this? Dick and Jenette – where are you when we need you?"

Well, it seems it's still wise to be careful of what you wish for, you might just get it. Apparently, Dick and Jenette had noticed the moral degeneracy that had been going on in their line of books, so they were hunched over a typewriter when we needed them, devising **DC Comics' Standards and Practices** for their editors, as well as a letter to freelancers indicating that while DC believes "fiercely" in the First Amendment, it has no intentions of testing the water.

The actual arrival of the guidelines were preceded by protests and editorials in that most frequent of comics publications, the **Comics Buyer's Guide.** Frank Miller, who smelled a trick in the air, set out to kill the plan in its egg, touching off a debate about censorship in the editorials and letters pages that still rages. Issac Newton would have been proud of the reaction that followed DC's move. Fans both applauded and protested the move that is designed to stem what some perceive as a growing tide of criticism of the increasingly lurid contents of some comics. Some letter-writers bemoaned the creatively stagnating effects of the guidelines (which is, of course, a generous term), and creators hissed about the sudden shackling of their

Illustration By Richard Hilliard

creative process. Marvel has been quiet on the censors' front, outside of the announcement that they'll be replacing the Comics Code Authority's seal on applicable books that are sold in the direct-sales market. Big deal.

After **Swamp Thing** and **Dark Knight**, it seemed that DC was entering a period of **glasnost** (forgive the trendy Russian – you know how comics are influenced by the political climate). Finally, Mort Weisinger's lingering shadow was fading. It was that much more surprising, then, to see the guidelines espousing creatively reactionary tenets such as "Destructive behavior cannot be shown as acceptable," in which case much of Jack Kirby's work, that featured large-scale civic havoc and demolition, must be unacceptable to DC. In which case Superman will be restricted to using his strength for cases that don't involve destruction. Also, the part about avoiding "graphic nudity, sexual behavior and salacious content" sounds ominously like an echo of the Code's "Suggestive and salacious illustration is unnacceptable."

The letter that DC Publisher Jennette Kahn sent to freelancers regarding the implementation of the guidelines deftly smooths over the fundamental conflict within the new guidelines. Kahn writes that ". . . we will continue to take risks in what we decided to publish. The labeling system allows us to take those risks . . . We believe in our right to publish whatever material we care about. We do not intend to make any concessions on our editorial content." Then, one look at the **Standards and Practices** proclamation makes clear the concessions that freelancers will have to make. No, the **publisher** won't be the one . . .

Another factor to be considered about the guidelines is that although they're obviously designed to protect DC from a witch-hunt onslaught of the New Right, any effort like this is doomed to futility if it's not industry-wide. Should the tribulations begin, Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority and Ed Meese won't go after the comic book industry with the exception of DC. "Oh, they're pure of heart over there" is a ridiculously vain hope. They'll bring down Archie as willingly as Marvel and DC, rest assured. As long as even one publisher is producing that can be termed "sick comix," the Falwells and the Meeses will be trying to get the First Ammendment waived for us. Besides, I thought the Code was supposed to protect us from the right-wing fringies – if it's not good enough, scrap it, but the industry shouldn't be afflicated with two concurrent sets of standards.

One thing that I and several people I've spoken with have found peculiar

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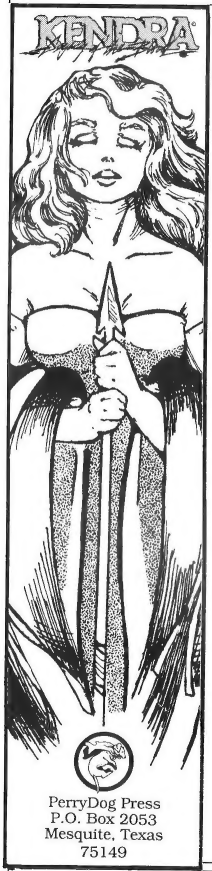

about the guidelines is that the Orwellian phrase "controlled distribution" is used rather than the "direct-sales market." Are the two different? Alan Moore seems to think so – he says he will not work for a company that puts his work in "controlled distribution," while he willingly works on books that are strictly in the direct-sales market, the implication being that he perceives a differences. Alas, we don't yet know.

Opposed as I am to Red-baiting, DC's new policies caused me to recall many of the fundaments of the Socialist Realism of 1950s Russia, and its creative restaints on artists and writers. Obviously, there are many people who share a hearty dislike of "sick comix," and who cannot appreciate the forms of expression that they deem to be "sick." The problem's crux, however, isn't the kind of writing or drawing that is better or more enjoyable or more edifying. The hert of the problem lies in the fact that DC executives (who, as Miller made abundantly clear, didn't consult with creators) impose their conception of a "good" comic book upon the creators and the buying public, just as the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a group of lifelong politicians, did to Russian sculptors, musicians, painters and writers, as well as the entire population of the Soviet Union.

Just as in the Soviet Union's literary and cultural circles in the mid-1950s, overly optimistic hopes for a softening of intellectual censorship in comic books have been dashed again and again, first by the Comics Code (which was inarguably more powerful when it was originated), then by the dominance of DC in the 1960s with its pre-adolescent product and then by the hegemony in the '70s and '80s of Marvel Comics, whose product is arguably even worse. DC's move is only the most recent example – the newest model in straightjackets.

To follow my Socialist Realism analogy to its conclusion, I cite the following passage, that appeared in a January 1954 editorial in **Pravda**, the official voice of the Soviety government. Once again – this was not included in DC's new set of standards:

'The unions of writers, artists, composers and architects, all of which include our artistic intelligentsia, are called upon to play a great role in consolidating the indestructible communion of artistic creation with the people's life. Who but the cultural union should decide collectively all those diverse questions which arise out of experience in artistic creation? Every artist should find within the fold of his organization answers to questions which trouble him and support him in his creative search and effort."

Here are some passages from the editorial guidelines put forth by the comics industry's own "cultural union:" "[The diversification of the comics audience] places a greater responsibility on all of us within the medium: We have to consider the age and level of sophistication of each comic book title's intended audience, and we have to approach that audience in a consistent manner.

"Beyond a doubt, DC Comics has a clearly defined responsibility to see to it that those of its titles are in universal display can be sold to readers of all ages. . .

". . . We feel an obligation to provide solid role models in these titles."

Obviously, the wording and the seriousness of purpose are different (after all, the Central Committee was looking to shape the perceptions of an entire people with its edict), but the similarities are striking. Not to imply that Frank Miller will be shot, or even exiled, if he violates the guidelines, but there are striking similarities in the intentions of the two movements. I realize I'm setting myself up to be labeled a Red-basher, and that would be an unfortunately superficial examination of the comparison I'm drawing; but the constraints that DC has imposed and those mandated by the Soviet Union's Socialist Realism are significant in their intellectual stifling.

Gee, why all this heavy stuff about the Russians and all? Is this **Four Color** or have I been reading **The Economist** again? Well, if the analogy seems harsh, it's because we, as a free republic, need to recognize historical precedents and react against them. After all, you know what happens if we don't learn from the past.

Now that I've managed to offend conservatives and communists, I'll give it a break. In **Four Color** #4, I'll wrap up this guest editorial with some discussion of the First Ammendment's role in the censorship issue.

FC

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letters

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Editing duties for this section are shared by the staff, who try and prefer to print letters in their entirety, when possible. A complete address cannot be printed unless the writer requests it to appear

All letters should be addressed to **Four Color** Magazine, P.O. Box 1146, Maplewood, N.J. 07040.

Great Spirit

Will Eisner
Will Eisner Studios
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Dear David:

My congratulations to all concerned on a very exciting production. The magazine is a lavish package and is a welcome 'up-grade' in the trade press.

I wish you great success. I hope my interview will contribute.

Satisfied Subscriber

William L. Ulrich
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15218

Dear Mr. Caruba,

I hate subscriptions. With that fundamental personal bias now publicly announced, please allow me to tell you why I thoroughly enjoy my new subscription to **Four Color** magazine.

There are two basic reasons why most subscribers feel as I stated in my opening remark: 1) Subscription copies arrive late, usually weeks after the issue appears on the newsstands and 2) subscription copies arrive in less-than-mint, if not poor, condition.

I knew when I received the first issue of my year subscription to **Four Color** a good week earlier than the appearance of its newsstand counterpart that PARAGON Q was serious in its intent to fulfill its advertisement promise that "...you will receive your copies sooner .." However, until today, I thought that PARAGON Q had become yet another victim of the Subscriber's Lament #2.

You see, the issue that I received about two weeks ago arrived in such poor condition as to be deemed unreadable. Upon returning my subscription bill with my $30, I scrawled a hastily-written note of my displeasure, requesting that it not happen again. I then thought no more of the incident.

Until today.

Today, my mail included a package from PARAGON Q that contained a fresh, mint-condition replacement copy of the damaged issue (packed with protective backer boards, no less!). More important than the issue, at that point, was a personal note from Mr. Caruba apologizing for the incident and promising continued responsiveness towards subscribers in the future.

This small effort, on the part of PARAGON Q has done more to impress me of the company's '...dedication to quality publishing...' than any multitude of other marketing efforts ever will.

Mr. Caruba, I just wanted you to know that I appreciated the professionalism that was demonstrated on behalf of PARAGON Q. It stands along side quite well with a new comics magazine whose professional appearance and content is heartily welcomed by this reader.

I wish you continued success with **Four Color**

Thank you. When we receive subscriptions we are serious in our intent to fulfill our promise to guarantee satisfaction. We share similar feelings as Mr. Ulrich. Having been weened for many years on poor subscriber policies, we can appreciate what a little consideration can do.

Random Thoughts In Four Color

Stephen Hinds
Kent, Oh. 44240

Dear **Four Color**,

Just picked up your new issue from my local comic shop. Your mag is really slick. I like your layout – a lot – it's well thought out, clean and attractive. Who exactly handles the layout, you or the printers? In either

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— Brad Elliot, *Amazing Heroes*

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case, it is really professional. I also like the use of color in the magazine. Your **Spirit** pages were beautiful and really made me feel like I got my money's worth. Is there any chance of more color pages in the future? I used to read **Comics Scene**, which was somewhat similar to **Four Color** but yours is much better.

Your news section was much better than in the previous issue. In particular, your story about the Comico/**Comics Buyer's Guide** censhorship (scandal?) really got me upset. To me, **C.B.G.** was always been a dependable and fair publication. I was shocked and very disappointed to see that they would remove the words "Sex" and "Drugs." Someone should remind them that it's 1987, not 1950. Don't.. they see how ridiculous cutting such common words is? Clearly, if this is going to be such a big deal to Krause, they should be consistent and screen all ads closely. They should also hold their editorial side to the same criteria

Just a few other random thoughts about the issue. I am also disgusted with the flooding of black and white comics. I thought your "Short, Happy Life of the Black and Whites" did a good job showing how bad the situation has become. There is just one question I've always wanted to ask about black and white comics: Why do people buy them? My favorite section of the magazine by far is the reviews. I'd definitely like to see more, maybe an expanded review section. My only real gripe with the issue was Barry Dutter's column. I fail to see how his **Star Trek** incidents have any relevance to comic collectors. I'd suggest Barry stick to topics more in keeping with comic collecting.

While I'm standing here on my soapbox, let me recommend my favorite series: **Grendel** is really hot, as is the new **Zot!** Byrne's **Superman** is living up to the hype and I agree with your review concerning how good "Batman: Year One" is. Finally, I still think **Cerebus** is the best independent being done.

Thanks for your letter. We enjoy reading mail on a variety of topics and not necessarily including our own magazine. Four Color is primarily designed and layed out by Scott Williamson, our art director. Scott would probably voice with you in favor of more color. As more readers subscribe, the number of color pages will increase.

Klutz Komments

Jeff Nicholson
Onward Comics
Chico, Ca. 95927

Dear Mr. Caruba,

I was quite surprised to see the cover of **Ultra Klutz** in your spread on black-and-whites. I don't know if you realize it, but that was an earlier incarnation of **U.K.** published back in '81, which doesn't quite fit into the recent boom.

As for the article, it was very well produced. An important subject for everyone involved. Some of us really are publishing out of love and lucked out on the boom and hopefully will survive the bust. I think you'll agree that my book at least has a handle on graphic design and consistency (it's monthly)

We agree. We enjoy Ultra Klutz and, by golly, it's monthly.

No Bread From Glenwood

Michelle Rheinecker
Glenwood Distributors
Collinsville, Il. 622343

Dear Sirs

As you are well aware of, Glenwood is experiencing serious cash flow problems. Due to an overstock of inventory and high receivables, we will not be able to pay your bill in total for some time. We are currently trying to get a receivable loan. Hopefully your bill will be paid in full by spring.

By Spring? Of what year? What really bothers us about your position is how many small publishers rely on your payment to survive. We hope many of these publishers who poured their heart into their work are able to somehow remain afloat. We find it ethically unacceptable that such a big distributor as yourselves, who ordered product from many publishers, is unable to fulfill your contractual obligation to pay your suppliers. These people shipped you their product on good faith, at a substantial discount, and you violated that. That is bad business, particularly coming from a "professional" distributor whose motto is, "Strictly Wholesale – To Give You More Sale."

Cash Flow Probems

Scott Rosenberg
President
Sunrise Distributors
Los Angeles, Ca. 90040

"An honest letter from Sunrise – a distributor having cash flow problems"

This is a hard letter for me to write, because I never thought it would happen to Sunrise, but the plain truth is that we're temporarily having cash flow difficultes due, in part, to over buying, and in large part to immense past due balances owed to us by our retail accounts. For the past two weeks, I have had meetings with accountants specializing in helping otherwise profitable companies get out of cash flow difficulties.
"A little history. . ."

Sunrise, as company policy, has always pushed independents -- because we believe in the independent market. We plan to continue pushing the comics, but we'll now push only the good ones. We've also led the industry in supplying back orders of both comics and games, and with your help, we'll continue to give our accounts (and occasional accounts) the best service available.

As the comic industry is aware, this past summer was nothing less than fantastic in terms of sales and of new publishing companies sprouting up. This past summer was the "good old days" in which an independent (especially a black-and-white independent) would fly off the racks regardless of price or content. Well, we all knew this couldn't last, but none realized the turn-around that would happen. Unfortunately, the retailers were placing their fall orders during summer – a boom-time summer! Consequently, store orders remained high throughout December (and will push into January due to late shipping books). When the real glut of product hit in October, it hit a market without the flow of out-of-school kids,

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summer jobs and dollars. The stores, obligated to honor their purchase orders, tried to cope – but could not. Some went out of business (and stuck their distributor not only with back debt, but with future purchase orders of comics that the distributor was still obliged to buy from publishers), and some started to refuse part of their shipments (and said they would go bankrupt if forced to take the goods), and many, many stores simply bounced checks – signing notes to make good when times get better.

On an incident by incident basis, the refused orders were too small to call publishers with order cuts – unfortunately, these incidents all added up – and all the bounced checks started hitting, and Sunrise fell further and further behind.

The bottom line...

I met with accountants and lawyers who helped me put this whole situation into perspective. We now have a grip on our large accounts receivable, and collections are programmed out over the next six months. We have also computerized our receivable to allow us instant access to late paying accounts. Although we are beginning to weed out the frailer accounts, our sales in most of our divisions are reaching record levels. Due to company wide efforts (and the help of the computer) we're becoming "lean and mean."

What we need now is a temporary moritorium on past invoices – all invoices dated/received by our office on or before January 8, 1987. What this will enable us to do, is pay all new invoices on time. This will allow us to manage our cash flow, and you will be able to count on the timely arrival of each payment. As most of you are aware, we have never bounced a check, and we have never said "the check is in the mail" – Sunrise has built its reputation of being truthful and fair – and this letter is continuing the effort.

"In a nutshell..."

I'll send you an update on our collections/payment progress in April, and I plan to start cleaning up past invoices by July 1 (hopefully before, but I want to be conservative)

Although it will definitely be hard for you to temporarily put aside our past debt (as it was hard for us with our accounts), please consider all orders shipped to us from this day on as being shipped (with normal payment terms and discounts) to a new account (the NEW Sunrise, if you

will)—an account that pays on time and that is profitable to deal with.

We appreciate the candor and integrity shown by Sunrise to the publishing community. One can only respect and sympathize with a distributor having a cash flow problem, especially one who goes 'public' rather than issuing denials and ignoring their responsibility to their suppliers. What is interesting is the fact that the retailers, according to Sunrise, failed to foresee a decline caused by the loss of summer revenue by out of school children. This failure to foresee the forthcoming loss in revenue dramatically affected this distributor, and we're sure, others as well. Perhaps it is time for the retailers to utilize tools of good business management, such as business projections, rather than 'winging it.' On the same hand, perhaps it is time distributors make a greater effort in educating their retail accounts in sound business practices. While hiring an accounting/marketing/business expert to serve as a full time liaison with store owners may be an initially expensive investment, it will certainly more than pay for itself in the long run. This resident expert, by consulting one store and helping it move back into the black, will easily pay his/her own salary ten-fold.

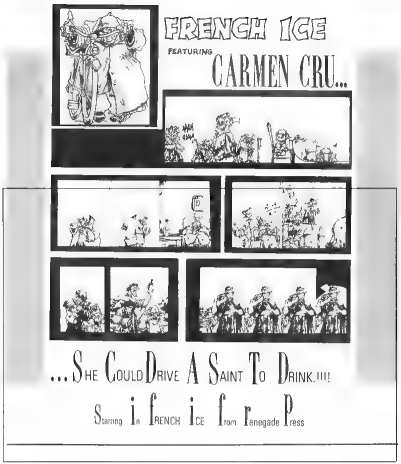
Such a lack of professional retail management that is very common today hurts the entire industry, from the distributors to the publishers who will now have to potentially survive for several months without their payment for goods.

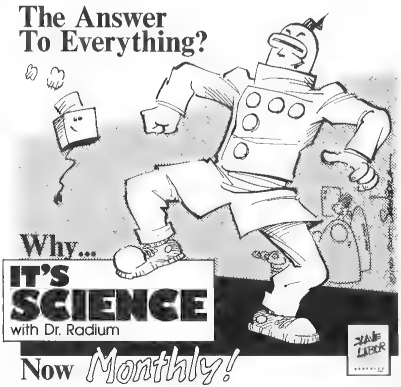
A Connoisseur Sends In Some Bucks And Food For Thought

Briton Rothrock
Roanoke, Va. 24014 2513

Dear Sirs,

Enclosed please find payment for my subscription to your wonderful magazine. I very much appreciated your mailing it in a sealed envelope. I subscribe to a number of publications and nothing is more irritating than a





torn cover or an address sticker on the front cover. I hope you plan to continue this mint condition delivery.

I just have a few comments that I would like to make about the first two issues. First, as many people have noted, the cover to issue one was beautiful. Bill Bradshaw was certainly able to capture the dark, gritty spirit of the Batman that DC has been using as of late. DC could do a lot worse than to talk to Mr. Bradshaw about doing some **Detective** covers. Randy Elliott's cover for the second issue was also very well done.

Your news column, I think is a bit redundant. I really don't know who makes up your readership (do you?), but if they are truly "comic book connoisseurs" than they probably read **The Comics Buyer's Guide** and it is all old news to them. The opinions do add a great deal however, and I would like to see more of this.

The second issue opened with a whiz-banger of an editorial (yes, I'm one of the few people who actually read them). Even though fans will hold onto a well done series no matter how late it is (take for example **Cerebus** that has not been on schedule for as long as I have been collecting it and Dave Sim has gone on record as saying it probably never will be), an uneven publishing schedule is probably the fastest way to kill a book with a less devoted readership.

The Will Eisner interview was very good, but then how can your go wrong with Eisner? The fact that he wouldn't talk about the TV movie was a bit upsetting. The Christmas article was interesting, though it was a month late and the accompanying artwork was absolutely to die for.

The review column has been very good so far. I especially liked Bob Grey's review of **Web of Spider-Man** #25. Normally I wouldn't approve of a comic being torn apart like that, but I have to agree that it is probably the single worst comic book ever written (and the series was on an upswing too).

On the whole, a very well put together magazine, guys. I hope you can keep it up. I think you can.

We take considerable pride in our cover artists. Both Bill and Randy are unknown so far in this industry and yet both have outstanding talents and are very successful artists in their own right. We look forward in the future of introducing more artists of such aptitude. Regarding your comment about our news section, our criteria for print is not what has been out so far. Rather, we select articles that we feel are of interest to our readership, specifically comic readers who want more than regurgitated press releases.

An Experience Hard To Forget

Kirt Kunduraziefff
Pomona, Ca 91767

Dear David.

My subscription card is in the mail, two issues having convinced me that you have a definite winner on your hands. But first off, just as a precautionary measure you understand, here is a disclaimer of sorts:

Any connection between my becoming a charter subscriber to this fine new magazine and its future success or failure is purely coincidental despite the undeniable fact that I was previously one of the first to subscribe to one of 1986's most promising newcomers, **Comic Opinion Monthly Newsletter**. We all know what happened to it!

Seriously though, **Comics Buyer's Guide** may be the most informative, but your magazine, after just two issues, is turning out to definitely be the most exciting.

As much as I love **C.B.G.** and **Amazing Heroes**, like **Comics Journal**, **Comics Interview** and applaud the steady improvement in **Comics Feature**, I must admit that reading your magazine is an experience hard to forget or describe. The themes of your articles are presented in such a way that constantly demands one to think about what he's reading as he goes along, not after finishing the article, thereby better understanding the subject discussed.

Believe me, both installments of "Forum," Ron Thomas' article on black-and-white comics, Point Blank, several other articles, reviews and commentary were eye-opening and provide considerable food for thought.

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Four Color Magazine for Comic Book Connoisseurs.

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THE LIZARD KING RETURNS

Move over Boris the Bear, he's more powerful than 64 stories of Concrete. Dark Horse Publications has accomplished what millions of Japanese failed to do in previous encounters, capture that danged horrific, fire-breathing reptilian, Godzilla. After escaping Marvel's clutches in the late 70s and disappearing from the face of comicdom, America's favorite imported behemoth is scheduled to return in a one issue special next May.

"We are hoping our version will be a Godzilla unlike any Godzilla you've seen before," said Dark Horse Editor Randy Stradley. He will be somewhat closely related to the Godzilla in the first movie and **Godzilla '85**. That was the line of thought we had going into it and we were pleased to find out that was the same tact Toho wanted us to take."

Toho Company Ltd., for Godzillophiles who are unfamiliar, is the Japanese company holding all rights to the character. Wary of how a new comic book version would come off, the company granted Dark Horse rights to produce a one-off. If the special is favorably received by both fans and Toho, the possibility of a regular Godzilla series is good.

Godzilla, King of The Monsters Special #1 will be 32 black-and-white pages with a full color cover. Artist Stephen Bissette of **Swamp Thing** fame will handle the pencils. Inking on the comic will be provided by Marvel-regular Tony Salmons, whose work has appeared on **Night Mask** and **Dr. Strange**, amongst others.

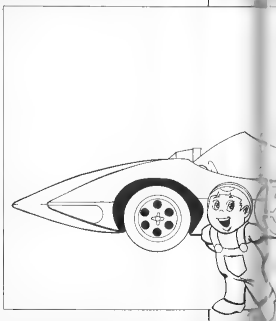
Godzilla and Swamp Thing have more in common than just artist Bissette. Apparently, both creatures are elementals. They also are green and have bad breath. But seriously, this is an interesting, new revelation in the saga of Godzilla, who has been on the Earth, according to Stradley, since the beginning of time. Clearly there is a more encompassing story to be told than that of just an ordinary, 64-story lizard.

While Stradley was hesitant to reveal much about the one-shot's storyline, he said it deals with Godzilla's first appearance in the modern world. "We are postulating that for the last 200 years at least, no one has seen him. There hasn't been any word about him. So when he appears in modern times, it is a big shock to everyone." The story takes place in the 1960s.

"He's definitely the bad guy," said Stradley. "Not that he is intentionally killing people, he simply has no concern whatsoever for them."

As if this magnum opus weren't enough to attract purchasers, the issue will also contain four or five full page pin-ups by different artists. Paul Gulacy, Charles Vess, Rick Veitch, Paul Chadwick, Harrison Fong, Alan Moore (yes THAT Alan Moore) and others will contribute to this and a possible Godzilla portfolio.

This summer promises to be a banner season for lizard zealots One can only hope next for the return of Godzilla's legacy to mankind, Godzooky.



HERE COMES SPEED RACER

Japanese animation fans will be delighted to hear that another classic series will be returning via the comic book route. Speed Racer, one of the most popular animations of the '70s, has been optioned by NOW Comics of Chicago. The new series, set to begin this June, will be a monthly, full color, deluxe comic book.

"Speed Racer is going to be overall a very entertaining comic book." Said Publisher Tony Caputo. "The entire series will be original stories. The basic premise of doing **Speed Racer** as a comic book is to give the fans what they've always wanted to know. Something the cartoon could never give them. Something a little more sophisticated.

That premise will take the form of Speed Racer's origin in the first issue, according to writer Len Strazewski. Strazewski, whose comic work includes the NOW series **Dai Kamikaze** and several **Troll Lords** back-ups for Tru Studios has been following Speed Racer since his inception. "I enjoyed **Speed Racer** and I'm looking forward to taking it a step above its animated level," said Strazewski.

Speed Racer, for those unfamiliar with the demon on wheels, was a teenage race car-driving adventurer. Speed idolized his older brother, who he thought died in a fiery car crash. In actuality, his brother is still alive masquerading as the mysterious Driver X, who always rescues Speed in the nick of time and then disappears.

At press time, Gary Thomas Washington has been chosen as the penciller of the series. Washington is relatively fresh to the comics medium, his most recent work being NOW's one-shot, **A Boy And His 'Bot**. No inker has been announced.

According to Caputo, **Speed Racer** will be a serious adventure comic. "Its going to have the same feel as **Speed Racer**, the animation. It's going to look at the problems of Speed Racer, the teenager. He's taking a lot of risks," said Caputo.

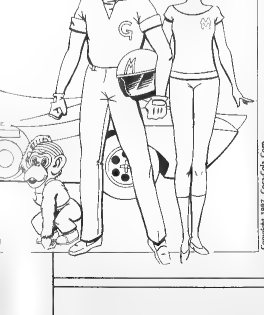
Speed Racer, said Caputo, is only 17, however, "he's an intelligent kid. He graduated high school early." Added Strazewski, "I want to treat Speed as a teen in the adult world."

Caputo cites **Speed Racer**'s popularity in this country due to the program being broadcast constantly for almost a decade. "Most contracts for broadcast of Japanese animations stated that after one year of showing the tapes they're to be destroyed," said Caputo. "For some reason **Speed Racer**'s contract did not say that so all syndicated stations in the U.S. that played them did so almost every day. People remember **Speed Racer** for that reason."

To prepare himself for scripting Speed's adventures, Strazewski said he is gearing up for a marathon **Speed Racer** weekend. "I'm getting ten or twelve tapes full of episodes to refresh my memory, as I haven't seen the show since college."

Coca-Cola presently owns the rights to the cartoon series and, according to Caputo, will be merchandising **Speed Racer** in the near future. "There is a lot of potential with **Speed Racer** being owned by Coca-Cola," said Caputo. He said a new **Speed Racer** series is also a possibility as Coca-Cola now owns Columbia Pictures.

For **Speed Racer** fans who cannot wait until summer, three episodes are available for purchase on video cassette. The only catch is they are sandwiched between episodes of **The Mighty Hercules**. Drive down to your local video suppliers.



Spridel, Chin-Chin, Speed Racer and the lovely Tracy pose by the powerful Mach 5 in NOW's revival.

SPIDER-MAN TO WED

Send out the wedding invitations, the Amazing Spider-Man is about to tie the knot! According to scripter

David Michelinie, the event will take place in this year's **Amazing Spider-Man Annual**, out in June.

Michelinie's first issue as scripter of **Amazing Spider-Man** is #290, in which Peter Parker proposes to Mary Jane Watson.

Said Michelinie, "In the previous issue, written by Peter David, Peter Parker reconciled his problem over whether or not he should continue to be Spider-Man. He should be content, but he's not. He tries to figure out what's missing. Then he realizes that while he's spent all this time deciding whether to be Spider-Man or not, he's been denying that he's Peter Parker.

"He decides it's time for Peter Parker to take front and center. One of the ways he goes about this is by getting together with Mary Jane."

According to Michelinie, Mary Jane takes two issues to think about Peter's

proposal. Issues #291 and #292 of **Amazing** deal with Mary Jane's past. Tom DeFalco brought in a sub-plot in **Amazing** #259 involving the estrangement of Mary Jane and her sister Gayle. There will be a face-to-face confrontation between Mary Jane and Gayle in #291 and #292. At the end of #292, Mary Jane gives her final answer to Peter.

Peter proposed to Mary Jane once before in **Amazing Spider-Man** #182. At the time, she rejected his proposal.

The wedding actually came up much quicker than anyone had planned. "We had to move the wedding up unexpectedly," said Michelinie. "We just found about about it in October. Stan Lee decided to have Peter get married in the newspaper strip in June and that meant we had to do it the same month in the comic."

How will Spider-Man's wedding be different from other super hero weddings?

"That is something that is going to be very difficult. Jim Salicrup, Spider-Man's editor, is a big **St. Elsewhere** fan, and that's a show where they tend to do very non-standard storylines. They do dream sequences, fantasies and flashbacks. They use all kinds of scenarios to explore particular character points. They get into the hopes and fears of the characters, possible futures, etc. We may do something like that. We want to do something as intriguing as possible. It's not going to be your standard thing where all the super villains show up. It will hopefully be innovative."

Michelinie said some super heroes might show up at the wedding, but if they do, they will not be in costume. He added that Peter Parker, after all, is getting married, not Spider-Man.

The wedding will most likely occur on the steps of city hall. According to Michelinie, this can really be done with a proper permit. There is even talk of Marvel hiring an actual fashion designer to design Mary Jane's gown.

As for who Peter Parker's best man will be, Michelinie said he is not sure yet. "That's a tough question to answer because Peter Parker really doesn't have any close male friends. We could use Flash Thompson, but he might still be in the hospital after what happened to him in #289. We could use J. Jonah Jameson but that might be pushing things a bit! I don't see how, by any stretch of the imagination, Peter Parker could choose Jameson as his best man."

Michelinie added that most everybody from the supporting cast will be at the wedding. "Actually, one thing I'd like to explore more is Peter Parker's relationships with the people around him. I'd like to make Mary Jane his closest friend. The first year of their marriage is going to be a lot of them getting to know each other.

"We'll see that the reasons why she accepts are really the same as why Peter Parker proposed. But they really rushed into their marriage, the same way we had to rush to get the issue out. In time, their friendship will grow. Peter really wants Mary Jane to be his friend."

How will the marriage affect the relationship between Peter and his worrisome Aunt May?

"Peter will probably have to reassure Aunt May that he still needs

her," said Michelinie. "Peter will always need his Aunt May."

In the issues immediately following the wedding, there will be three fill-ins followed by Michelinie's return with a Dr. Octopus two-parter. "Oddly enough, those were my first two plots for **Amazing**, but now they're been pushed back to issues #296 and #297. I will probably have to revise those a little, since they were plotted before Peter Parker was married."

After Peter Parker's wedding, an encore in **Amazing Spider-Man** #300 might be pretty tough to pull off. "You might be surprised," said Michelinie. "I might pick up on a storyline I was doing in **Web of Spider-Man**, where we had someone who could get past Spider-Man's spider-sense.

"In one issue, he pushed Peter Parker on to subway tracks. In another, he pushed Spider-Man off a building. In issues #298 and #299, I may re-introduce that storyline, and it would conclude in issue #300."

Other than Dr. Octopus, Michelinie said he doesn't have plans for any other villains as of yet. "I should mention, though, that [**Web of Spider-Man** scripter] Jim Owsley will probably be using Electro, Mysterio and the new Hobgoblin over in that book. When I was doing **Web**, I had a Man-Wolf idea and I may do something with that.

"I'd also like to introduce some new villains. But for now, I intend to concentrate fully on the marriage."

It is ironic that Michelinie is writing Spider-Man's wedding when, just a few months ago, he came out as being vehemently opposed to the idea. But since the powers that be have determined that the wedding will take place no matter what, he has decided to do his best "to make the new situation work- and to explore the possibilities that it offers."

– Barry Dutter

GREAT COMIC ARTISTS TO APPEAR IN DOCUMENTARY

Some exciting news on the video front for fans of the great comic book artists. This summer, Ken Viola Productions, an independent video production company based in New Jersey, will be releasing **The Masters of Comic Book Art**, a one hour documentary that will be available in video stores and aired on PBS stations across the country.

Viola, who serves as the program's executive producer and director, raised the $100,000 in capital to make the video, conducting extensive interviews with many of the legends in the comic book industry. Included in the video are interviews with Will Eisner, Harvey Kurtzman, Jack Kirby, Neal Adams, Berni Wrightson, Moebius, Frank Miller, Dave Sim, Art Spiegelman and perhaps Viola's biggest coup, Steve Ditko, who read a statement he prepared. The video is narrated by noted author Harlan Ellison.

"I believe that the great work done in comics is equal to the great work done in films, television and novels

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but is unrecognized by the general public at large," said Viola. ""What I aimed for is not to present the history of the comic book but to show the thought process that lies behind the work of these men. I also wanted to show the possibilities the comic book medium has to offer."

Viola began filming the video in November, 1986. The program will be completed in March. Viola primarily produces rock music programs. His series **Rock Influences** for MTV earned him two Ace Awards nominations, cable's equivalent to television's Emmys. After completing the second season of **Rock Influences**, Viola found himself in between projects and decided to make an independent documentary on the more renowned comic book artists. "I wanted to make a program that reflected positively on the great work that has been done in comic books over the past 50 years.

"All the artists, in their own ways, are very unique storytellers. Their personal philosophies and life experiences come across in their work and gives to the reader an example of how man could and should act."

One artist who shares his personal philosophies is Steve Ditko, a creator renown for shunning any interview. While Ditko himself does not appear on camera, he did prepare and read a statement about his work that appears in the program illustrated with samples of his artwork. "Steve Ditko feels that the personality and physical appearance of the man should not be confused with his work," said Viola. ""He believes the interview format is not a true representation of a person's inner feelings and beliefs.

"He decided his involvement would be to compose and speak a piece that would express exactly how he feels about heroes, villains and the role of art in the comic book medium."

One artist who is not featured on the video is Jim Steranko. When questioned about this, Viola explained that while Steranko's work was exciting, he did not produce a large body of work. "His influence is more a footnote in history."

Jack Kirby, on the other hand, is featured extensively in a discussion on how he felt creating gods and super mortals. "After growing up and being influenced by Kirby's work, it was inspiring meeting him in person," said Viola

While the program will only run for an hour, several hours of interview were actually conducted with each artist. Viola said that his future plans include releasing longer-form interviews with the individual artists.

Independent producer Ken Viola flew all over the U.S. to interview comics' greatest artists Viola, below left, poses with ***Mans*** *creator Art Spiegelman in New York city.*

VALKYRIE, LOST PLANET AND HOTSPUR TO DEBUT FROM ECLIPSE

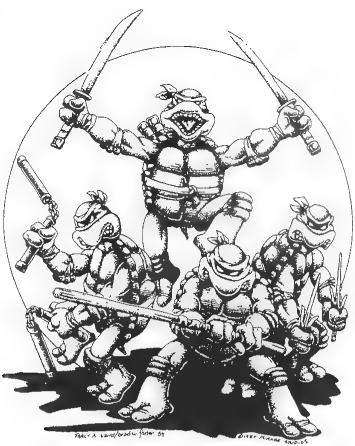
Eclipse Comics has announced publication of **Valkyrie**, a three issue monthly mini-series devoted to the exploits of one of **Airboy**'s most popular characters. **Valkyrie** will be written by Chuck Dixon of **Airboy**, pencilled by Paul Gulacy (**Six From Sirius** at Marvel) and inked by Willie Blyberg, who has also worked on **Airboy**.

Initially, it was Dixon's idea to spin off Valkyrie (something Eclipse has done in the past with other characters), but the concensus of Eclipse management is that it had to happen anyway. There have been numerous requests from readers for more on Valkyrie, but Dixon has resisted the temptation to increase her role in **Airboy** for fear of wearing the character out. Although he would not be opposed to a second mini-series or special on Valkyrie, Dixon said he is definitely against the idea of creating a separate series on her.

For the uninitiated, in the 1940s Valkyrie was a Luftwaffe pilot, head of an all-female fighter squadron called the "Air Maidens." After coming up against Airboy and, believe it or not, defeating him, Valkyrie fell in love with Airboy and defected to the allies after her Air Maidens were condemned to death by the Nazi bigwigs. In Eclipse's modern day **Airboy**, Valkyrie has been awakened from suspended animation looking barely a day older (Airboy is, of course, the son of the original)

As the mini-series opens, Valkyrie, who is living in New York, fends off a mugger who tries to rob her on the street. A local TV news crew happens to be in the area and they capture the event on tape. Valkyrie's friend and roommate Marlena convinces her to go public and soon she is posing for **Vogue** and gracing the cover of **Time**.

Among those following Valkyrie's new-found career are the KGB. Allegedly, Valkyrie's old squadron destroyed a village inhabited by displaced children during the war and



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- Five Adventure Scenarios.
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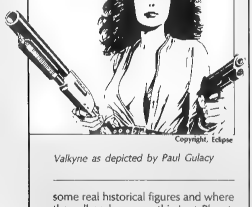
now the Russians want her to stand trial for war crimes. They manage to kidnap Valkyrie and whisk our heroine off behind the Iron Curtain. Eclipse's Editor-In-Chief, Cat Yronwode, declined to reveal any more.

According to Dixon, Airboy's appearance in **Valkyrie** will consist of a single panel. Eclipse anticipates that **Valkyrie** will prove to be a major hit, as it appeals to **Airboy** fans and non-fans alike, since the story is completely self-contained. **Valkyrie**, which is set to begin in May and run until July, will sell for $1.75 a copy.

Lost Planet, also starting in May, is a six part mini-series written and drawn by Bo Hampton, released bi-monthly. "It's a science fiction adventure story," said Publisher Dean Mullaney. "It involves missing persons including



Valkyne as depicted by Paul Gulacy

some real historical figures and where they all end up – on this Lost Planet, to which they are somehow instantaneously transported."

The two major characters in **Lost Planet** are Tyler Flynn and Rodney Riskind whose exploits we follow after they have been mysteriously beamed to this strange world. There, they meet such long lost luminaries as Amelia Earhart, Ambrose Bierce and Judge Crater, all of whom disappeared in real life under mysterious circumstances (we nominate Jimmy Hoffa for a cameo).

Each issue will be 32, full color pages, priced at $1.75. The format includes first a Lost Planet story, followed by a back-up piece. In the first issue, the latter feature will be written and drawn by Scott Hampton. From the second issue on, Bunny Hampton-Mack will take over writing duties on the backup, with various artists holding up the visual end.

"Some said he was sent from Heaven. Others thought he rose from Hell. Actually, he was from Cincinnati. . ." This is how Eclipse described Josef Quist, the title character of **Hotspur**, a three issue series coming in June. **Hotspur** reunites John Ostrander and Timothy Truman, who worked on the early adventures of First Comics' highly successful **Grimjack** character.

Ostrander and Truman conceived **Hotspur** some time ago. "We came up with the idea during a road trip to a minicon in Indiana when Grimjack was still a backup feature in **Starslayer**," Truman said. "John was telling me about some of the more colorful people he's met in his theater work. One of these people is a good friend of John's who is one of the last masters of stage combat." Anyone versed in stage combat today would be a walking anachronism. The days have long passed when on-stage action was a regular feature of the theater. So, Josef Quist not only finds work hard to get but people seem to find him hard to take. He has molded his life after the swashbuckling Errol Flynn type of role. Quist is hopelessly out of place until, that is, he is transported to the magical city of OOSHTALA!

"John, illustrator Karl Waller and I wanted to create a series with lots of Burroughsian swordplay and romance. . . and tinge it with some of the darkness one finds in the work of people like Moorcock and Clark Ashton Smith. It's a lot like a role-playing game come to life," described Truman. **Hotspur** will ship the second week in June.

BARBARIC, 12TH CENTURY SURVIVAL

Genesis West, a new comic book company based in Simi, California, has announced publication of **Last of the Viking Heroes**, a 32 page bi-monthly color book set to debut in March. The company plans to have two more titles on the stands by the end of the year. At the moment, **Viking Heroes** already has its first four issues completed. "We're going to guarantee on time publication," said founder Richard French, "and that's the best way to do it."

French, a former aerospace engineer for Rockwell International, started Genesis West a year and a half ago but the company is only now getting off the ground. It was graphic artist Mike Thibodeaux, former associate of Jack Kirby and Pacific Comics, who convinced French to enter the field. "Yes, I am financing the entire venture," French said, confident of its success.

Thibodeaux has control over the story, art and overall direction of **Last of the Viking Heroes**, which tells the story of four valiant Vikings fighting for survival in the barbaric 12th Century. The first issue features a cover by Kirby and Thibodeaux. Future covers will feature the work of John Byrne (**Superman**), Dave Stevens (**The Rocketeer**), George Perez (**Wonder Woman**) and Howard Chaykin (**Time-2**).

The first two issues of **Viking Heroes** will sell for the special introductory price of $1.50. "Mike's stories can't be constrained to a specific page count," French says, "so that's how they'll run. As for the price, it will go up to $1.75 starting with issue three."

Genesis West has an extensive plan of development reaching into 1992 that will see ten four-color titles released. Their next title, which has not yet been announced, will feature, what else, super heroes.

– Glenn A. Magee

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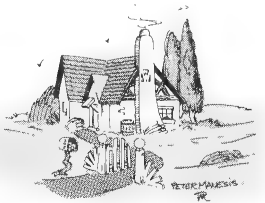

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What does the future hold for Cutter, Skywise & Leetah?

SAGA OF THE WOLFRIDERS

By Ron Thomas

Illustration by Wendy Pini

The magic lives again. After more than two years, **ElfQuest** is back in production with an all new black-and-white adventure continuing the saga begun twenty issues earlier. For the fans who grew along with the adventures of Cutter, Skywise, Leetah and the rest, it's a joyous reunion with old friends. For those, who, for some reason or other, were not along for the original quest, the new series is an introduction to one of the most elaborate fantasy realms ever created.

What neither group of fans may realize is that the co-creators of this wonderful series are realists who have also grown some along the way. **ElfQuest** has been a journey for Wendy and Richard Pini with as many twists and turns as the path followed by the elves they chronicle.

BOY MEETS GIRL (SORT OF):

The way that Wendy and Richard Pini met is already something of a legend among fans and, better yet, it's true. Way back in 1969, Richard had "just schlepped my comics up to my cold, bricklined dorm room," when he read a letter in **Silver Surfer #5** that touched a responsive chord in him.

"Back in those days, comics letters were really all alike...arguing about powers and which character was stronger. 'Could the Thing beat up Thor?'" However, one letter was different. As Stan Lee wrote in **Son of Origins**, "There seemed something biblically pure about our Silver Surfer...someone who would graphically represent all the best, the most unselfish, qualities of human life." It was Wendy whose letter picked up on these traits and went further, noting that the Surfer always seemed to suffer at the hands of insensitive humans. In her letter, she addressed the point that humankind is not all bad and is capable of expressing higher moral qualities. This idea struck Richard who wrote to Wendy.

For the next few years, they corresponded and ran up long distance telephone bills. In those days, Richard was studying at M.I.T. in Boston. Meanwhile, Wendy was at an experimental college south of San Francisco called Pitzer College where, as she recalled "the teachers were all hippies

and the classes were all taught out on the lawn." This blossoming romance was benefitting AT&T more than anyone else until Wendy moved back east in 1972. A wedding followed shortly thereafter in the same year. Richard then went into what he called his "planetarium years" and taught high school.

Anyone who can see foreshadowing in literature could also see it developing in the real lives of Wendy and Richard Pini. Richard has said before that he identifies with the elf Skywise, keeper of the lodestone and itinerant stargazer. That's not too far removed from his real life scientific background. Wendy said that her notions about human relationships, as expressed in that letter almost two decades ago, still pervade her work. "We've been dealing with that theme ever since in **ElfQuest**," she said.

It was in 1977 that Wendy first proposed the idea of doing a comic book of their own. By 1979, Richard was working for IBM in what he described as a very stable, fringe-benefit, solid position. However, after six months of agonizing the Pinis took the plunge and, in 1981, they became a company. The name of that company is indicative of how close their working relationship is: WaRP Graphics, for **W**endy **a**nd **R**ichard **P**ini.

In the production of the **ElfQuest** books, the two almost became one person, "Locksending," to use an elfin term they coined for this union of mind they share. They co-plotted each issue until both were satisfied with the storyline. Wendy would then do the page layouts and script the panels. Next, Richard would edit the whole book, after which Wendy would finish the art.

For some couples, married or otherwise, such a close work relationship on top of a close personal relationship would be a great source of stress, at work and at home. After all, what is there to talk about after you come home from work? The Pinis, however, seem to have a handle on this. Richard noted that, while there are some disadvantages to such closeness as they have some separate interests, an advantage is that "we do show a united front. We are united in what we do."

THE WOLFRIDERS RETURN

"We always knew that someday we'd be back," Richard said of the latest addition to the saga, **Seige At Blue Mountain**, an eight issue mini-series coming from WaRP Graphics and Apple Comics. The interesting part is why this new black-and-white material had to come out now, after more than two years had passed since the original **ElfQuest** reached its intentionally open-ended conclusion. For the real reason look no further than Pee Wee Herman. No, really, Pee Wee Herman.

ElfQuest had always been envisioned in animation, either theatrical or for television. As those efforts continue with CBS for a Saturday morning animated show featuring the **ElfQuest** characters. It looked as though the series was going to get off the ground as much of the preliminary work was done. However, at the last minute, CBS made what Richard called an "infuriating" decision to go with an all comedy line-up. The time slot that previously would have gone to **ElfQuest** became the new address for **Pee Wee's Playhouse**. "We're trying to live it down," said Richard.

The CBS option expired in 1986 without the network producing a single show. Thus, the television rights reverted back to the Pinis who are still working on bringing **ElfQuest** to the small screen in full animation (more on that later). "When we didn't make it at CBS, we knew we had to republish to keep it fresh," Wendy said. Thus, the new series will keep studio interest alive as well as bring new adventures to the reading public. Paperbacks and Marvel reprints, **ElfQuest: Seige At Blue Mountain** features a new storyline

Elf-creators Richard and Wendy Pini take a break.

Wendy Pini's crisp pencils for the splash page of "Siege" #4 illustrate her wonderful ability to capture the warmth of the elves.

HERE COMES RAYEK.
AGAIN.
UH HUH.
SAME AS YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEFORE.
REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU. I'LL HANDLE HIM. IF HE RAISES A STINK, JUST KEEP QUIET!
Copyright 1987 WaRP Graphics

rendered in black-and-white, as were the original **ElfQuest** stories.

Of course, the Pinis aren't giving out details about the series but there are some tnemes that they discussed readily. Wendy pointed out that the new series goes all the way back to her comics "roots" in that old **Silver Surfer** letter, dealing with "the relationship of elves to humans. By the time the series is finished, they will go through a major learning step." She added that probing these relationships is "near and dear to me."

"Because it's only eight issues, we're telling a compact story that's headed toward a very definite point," she added. "At the end, a lot of things will come tumbling down!"

Richard was quick to jump in and add that, while Wendy's remark was "very signficant," he wasn't going to say whether it was literal or figurative or if this supposed tumbling would be for the elves or the humans.

DESIGNED WITH ANIMATION IN MIND

"ElfQuest was conceived as a film on paper," Wendy said. "I can see it moving before my eyes. I like the reader's eye to follow the panels in motion."

To that end, she has adapted cinema techniques of framing and shadow (precolorization), and quite deliberately. She likes to experiment with camera angles much the same way that Will Eisner did on **The Spirit**. In fact, she rejected such a comparison, not wanting to put herself in that class of greatness. Her fans may disagree, though, as her work developed into a more refined cinematography as the series progressed. She humbly refers to it as "something I've learned over the years."

Another influence from animation for Wendy's art was the 60s show **Jonny Quest**. "I was an enormous **Jonny Quest** fan. I watched it avidly. I can quote episodes chapter and verse," she said. She was also very free with her praise of Doug Wildey who designed the original **Jonny Quest** model sheets for Hanna-Barbera. "Doug Wildey taught me more about placing the human figure in motion and the placement of blacks" than she had learned formally.

Wendy's art could have been, and was, characterized as too "cartoony" but that was another intentional effect. "The series was designed with animation in mind. I have found that it is possible to convey quite serious human concerns through child-like art."

Titles like **Jen of Hiroshima** and **Maus**, both dealing with the horrors of World War Two, came immediately to mind as other examples of combining a lighter artistic style with a very heavy script for balance. The elves, for example, feature big eyes and round faces atop small bodies. However, Wendy thinks this works to their advantage as characters.

"Readers are attracted by the way they look," she said. "I can put these characters through a horrendous situation and develop a protective response from the reader."

The storyline never suffered, dealing with death, sex, prejudice, love and other such strong themes. "I don't think children should be shielded from the sensuality and eroticism of life. Then it becomes redirected into frustration and anger."

Richard concurred, adding that their intent has been to "wean the reader into more mature stories . . . while keeping the townsfolk with their torches and pitchforks at bay."

THE EMPIRE OF ELVES

One might think that success in one medium would translate easily into other media. After all, the 1980s seem to be the decade of spinoffs. However, Richard pointed out that the marketing of **ElfQuest** properties has been limited to the comics-oriented fan and "we've really saturated that small and well-defined market."

While the efforts have been largely directed at diversifying the publishing line into the areas of novelization, the anthology **Blood of Ten Chiefs** and the reprint projects, the marketing has not been extensive. Other than T-shirts, hats and the role playing game, there really hasn't been much done although "half a dozen years ago, that was very attractive to us," said Richard. Still, "nobody from the huge licensing companies was knocking on our door."

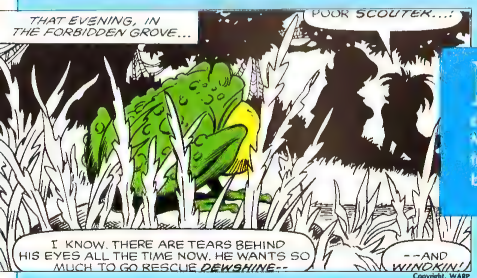
In a way, that was a mixed blessing. While fewer commercial commitments allowed the Pinis to concentrate their efforts more on the stories, it probably hurt their original goal, animation. As Richard put it, "Hollywood is a snake that eats its own tail. If we already had a line of toys, it would have been easy for us to sign with a studio. If we already had a series, any big toy company would want us."

Laboring under a Catch-22 like that is difficult but it has led to some branching out. One significant project is the "Wolves of Wolf Pack" portfolio that Wendy doesn't see as an **ElfQuest** project. Of course, some fans bought it because "Wendy's drawing Wolves" that are integral to the ElfQuest saga. However, the goal is really wildlife conservation and long-term plans are to get the portfolio a broader, non-comics audience. One idea is to market the portfolio in places like museum gift shops to raise more funds for the real goal. Another "experiment that was successful," according to Wendy, was the **Blood of Ten Chiefs**, an anthology of **ElfQuest**-inspired stories by renowned authors such as Piers Anthony and Robert Asprin. The book was well received and foreshadowed a new era for ElfQuest, one that would not include the Pinis to the same extent.

ELFQUEST WITHOUT WENDY AND RICHARD?

Arthur Conan Doyle felt trapped by Sherlock Holmes so he threw the master detective off Richenbach Falls. George Reeves was so typecast by his role as Superman that he put a bullet in his own brain. Sometimes such identification can be too much for a creative person who wants to branch out into other fields. Could **ElfQuest** go on without Wendy and Richard Pini as the co-creators? Steps are already being taken to prepare for that time.

It may be that **ElfQuest** could show the endurance of Tarzan or Superman and go


THAT EVENING, IN THE FORBIDDEN GROVE...
POOR SCOUTER...!
I KNOW. THERE ARE TEARS BEHIND HIS EYES ALL THE TIME NOW. HE WANTS SO MUCH TO GO RESCUE DEWSHINE--
--AND WINDKIN!
Copyright, WARP

ElfQuest cinematography: Moving frogs from foreground to background.

An early elf warrior by Wendy Pini.

on for years. Would Wendy and Richard burn out? That question is still open, according to Richard who said, "a lot of that depends on **ElfQuest**'s longevity. We'd love to believe that it will be popular for the next 50 years."

He added that if it became such an entertainment conglomerate, "neither of us want to be that involved. So, how do we solve that problem? We involve other people, as in **Blood of Ten Chiefs**, and throw open doors to fresh ideas."

If the animated series comes about, all new stories will be written and by writers other than the Pinis. Although they would still have script approval and the TV writers would work from the Pinis' guidelines, "outsiders" would be writing words for the elves to speak and adventures for them to share. Children's television being what it is, Wendy said the TV scripts could include spectacular violence but the erotic content that balanced it would be gone. The story would stay ambiguous, open to interpretation, rather than clobbering the young (eight to eleven) viewers with simplistic morals. The TV scripts would probably focus on the second generation of elves, the children of Suntop and Ember, and how they learn and grow.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Even the new mini-series has outside influences, so to speak, with Joe Staton now inking Wendy's pencils. Certainly, he was invited into the holt but by a sidelong route. When Wendy heard that a **Jonny Quest** comic was going to be published, her first response was, "Who do I have to kill to draw an issue?" Time limitations meant she couldn't do her own inks and Staton came to mind as someone who could mesh his style with hers. Going all the way back to his early **E-man** work, Staton showed a looseness, a comic flair that suggested it might work in tandem with Wendy's style.

That issue of **Jonny Quest** surprised a lot of people, according to Wendy. The story dealt with the death of Jonny's mother and was a very serious origin tale. She showed great dramatic range in realistic facial expression and more experimentation with camera angles. Still, the art closely resembled the original Hanna-Barbera incarnation.

Just as Wendy and Richard have open creative interaction on the story, now Wendy and Staton are melding on the art for **Siege At Blue Mountain**. "I'm learning through his feedback," Wendy said of Staton. "He's constantly amused by my use of framing devices."

For example, in issue three of the new series there is a sequence with a large frog in the foreground but the action with the principal characters is taking place in the background. At the end of the sequence, the frog is being harassed by a wolf in the background while the principal characters have moved to the foreground. The camera zooms in and out as a story plays out within a story like a Chinese box puzzle.

As they work together, Wendy and Staton are developing a work style that is like the old comics studios of the 1940s in which house artists specialized in figures or backgrounds and "team drawn" features. Wendy said, "He understands my line technique. I can just indicate that I want a character in silhouette or where I want a shadow to fall. A lot has to do with his sense of lighting. There is a firelit dance at the end of issue three, humans dancing around a fire. Joe makes it look as if the fire is flickering, in motion."

She said that involves a great deal of trust for her to let Staton do his own thing, so to speak, over a piece of her art. The flickering effect was a pleasant surprise but it fits with the whole stop-motion cinematography of the series.

Still, it leaves one to wonder about a time, maybe not so far off, when the Pinis will be "managing" **ElfQuest** rather than creating it. Richard coined the term and it seems apt. Wendy expressed a desire to do some writing in non-fiction and Richard will obviously be tied up with expanding business concerns. As the **ElfQuest** property is opened up to new creative input in writing and art, be it television or comics, the strip is sure to evolve into something new.

Fans may be seeing something that they'll resist at first. It won't be "official" **ElfQuest** material because Wendy and Richard Pini weren't as involved as they were at the saga's birth. The child is old enough to walk on its own, with guidance from its parents.

Maybe that's what **ElfQuest** is all about, anyway.

FC

GRRRRR!
RRR
NLL
RR
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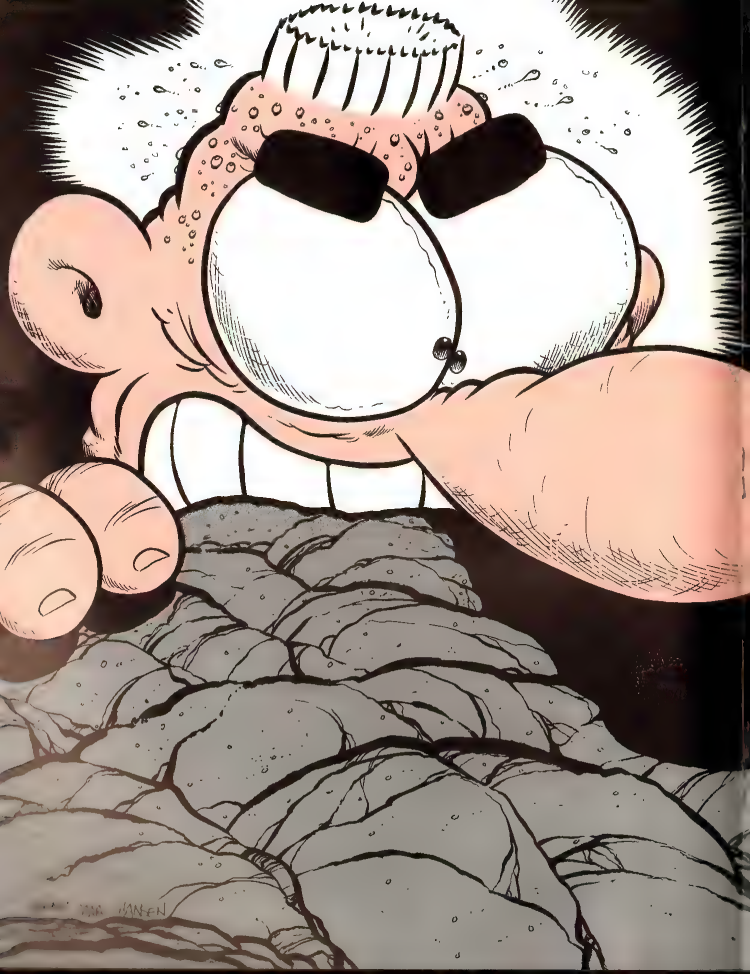


He's hip, he's cool, he's NOW, and Four Color is determined to capture him...

IN SEARCH OF RALPH SNART

America's next male sex symbol?

He has the imposing stature of Herve Villachez.

He possesses all the grace and gentle good humor of Yosemite Sam.

He displays the penetrating intelligence and implacable drive of Fat Freddy.

Mix all of the above ingredients together, season with a pinch of useless super power, place them in an unheated oven, and the result is a spicy souffle of hysteria and bad manners, the blatantly bizarre **Ralph Snart Adventures.**

Not too many years ago (though it seems like several lifetimes), humor and comic books fitted together with a natural ease. Just the term **comics** denotes subject matter of a humorous bent. Sadly, the last decade or so has witnessed "humor" and "comics" becoming mutually exclusive terms.

Mainstream titles like **Plop!, Crazy** and **Not Brand Ecch** were anthology books cast in the **Mad** mold. Only the Archie Group and **Groo The Wanderer** features a cast of continuing characters. Aside from the undergrounds and the recent upsurge of parody comics, funny "funny books" were dominated and finally buried by the burgeoning super hero craze triggered by the Silver Age of comics.

Now Comics' **Ralph Snart Adventures** is something of a throwback to the halcyon days of **Supersnipe, Herbie** and **The Inferior Five.**

FROM CRISIS TO DREAM

But unlike those aforementioned characters, Ralph Snart does not possess their tireless qualities. He does, however, have something that his predecessors didn't, the ability to escape from any crisis by entering a unique dreamworld. Unfortunately, the dream comes to an end, Ralph awakens and finds that the crisis he had tried to "dream away" has mushroomed to truly catastrophic proportions.

So, that is Ralph's lot in life: to stumble from crisis to dream to catastrophe; and therein lies his fundamental appeal. Ralph's creator and biographer Marc Hansen says, "A lot of bad things happen to him, but he gets through it. . . he manages to survive."

When asked if Ralph is based on any real life role model, Hansen replies, "Mostly myself and a couple of friends."

A native of Big Rapids, Michigan, Hansen earned an Associate of Arts degree and it was during his collegiate career that Ralph Snart had his inauspicious beginnings.

By Mark Ellis

Under the name of "Rog Snarf," Ralph appeared in a campus newspaper comic strip. Hansen was unaware of Kitchen Sink Press' underground comic entitled **Snarf**, "until Dennis Kitchen called it to my attention."

Even though the word "Snarf" wasn't properly trademarked, Hansen agreed to change the "F" to a "T" and while he was at it, he altered "Rog" to the more lyrical "Ralph."

Oddly enough, Hansen had no strong aspirations to break into the cartooning field. He took a job at a commercial art studio in Chicago, assuming, "that I'd always be into commercial art. But comics were always in the back of my mind until I fell into it."

Marc Hansen

He fell into it through Now Comics publisher, Tony Caputo. After meeting Hansen at the art studio, he requested to see his portfolio of illustrations. Upon looking through it, his reaction was, "You've never been published before!"

Impressed with Hansen's abilities, Caputo published a few of his cartoons in the short-lived periodical, **Fangraphix**. When Now was formed, Caputo agreed to test Ralph Snart's potential with a three issue mini-series. Caputo wasn't particularly optimistic at the time. "It was a test. I really didn't think it would take off."

But take off it did, and **Ralph Snart Adventures** became a regular monthly black-and-white title. Caputo says that the sales on the test series were surprisingly high, (10,000 to 18,000). Still, he was somewhat disappointed: "They're still extremely low for the quality."

Caputo explains that because it was a black-and-white humor series, many retailers didn't display it properly: "It reminded them of **The Freak Brothers**. They'd say, 'Ralph Snart? Oh yeah, we put them in the back with the undergrounds' – which is funny – because Marc has no feeling that these people (underground artists) influenced him."

Hansen agrees, stating that he wasn't "very familiar" with the work of Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton and others, because "I never even **read** any undergrounds."

He cites among his inspirations such notables as Harvey Kurtzman, Basil Wolverton, Tex Avery and "almost all of the E.C. people." He also greatly admires newspaper strip artists Mort Walker of **Beetle Bailey** and Dik Brown of **Hagar The Horrible**.

Hansen's style does draw heavily upon the surrealism of Wolverton and Avery. He distorts Ralph's body as though he's a dwarfish Plastic Man and he has his eyes bug out in the best Avery manner when his frenzied fantasies don't quite abide by his preconceptions.

Still and all, Ralph is, design-wise at least, reminiscent of certain underground comix characters. One can see in him echoes of Crumb's Mr. Snoid and Shelton's Phulbert Desanex. The similarity, faint as it may be, is made even more remarkable because it is accidental.

Animated cartoons, such as the Warner Brothers masterpieces, are drawn on as source material throughout the tales of Ralph. Also, homage is paid to another Ralph – Kramden, by surname.

HOLDING THE POT SHOTS

As far as storylines are concerned, Hansen does not take casual pot shots at any given target that might catch his eye – he takes careful aim and lets fly with uncanny and hilarious accuracy. Hansen understands the basic mechanics of satire (as opposed to parody) when he pokes fun at certain cherished notions, but it is never savage sarcasm. Instead of being an aloof, judgmental observer, Hansen effectively communicates to the reader that he himself has been in Ralph's oversized shoes.

Since Hansen is a fringe member of the group loosely known as "organized fandom," it is only proper that numbers one through three of the regular **Ralph Snart Adventures** blasted different icons and aspects of fandom's sub-culture.

In "Rodent Ralph," the mental tamperings of the deranged Dr. Groot triggered Ralph's "crazy imagining powers." Dreaming that he is bitten by a huge radioactive rat, Ralph is transformed into a "super being" known as Rodent Ralph.

Realizing that the super hero lot is a cheap attempt to boost sales, Ralph refuses to allow his powers to be exploited for gain. In a dramitic sequence, he vows grimly that, "I'm just to ignore everything that goes on in this stupid issue."

However, he is forced to compromise his principles when he is attacked by a hastily sketched super hero. He then finds himself swept up in "first collector's item issue mania" as Marvy's **Rodent Ralph** hits the stands.

Despite all efforts to resist and maintain his dignity, Ralph is dragged into the imbecilic goings-on of a super hero adventure. Faced with being swallowed and slowly digested by a villain named The Cosmic Crudulator, Ralph provokes the response in his adversary that he himself has been fighting through the entire story: He invokes the Crudulator's gag reflex and is vomited out to continue his "battle against the evils of crime."

A triumphant Rodent Ralph soars off into the sunset, muttering, "I gotta get cleaned up, I smell like a spit wad."

MIND WARPED

Issue two opens with Ralph (who, his usefulness at an end, has been dumped outside of town by Dr. Groot) being inadvertently and unceremoniously revived by a little boy relieving an agitated bladder.

Mind totally warped "by the electroshock tortures of Dr. Groot" (not to mention the fashion of his revival), Ralph wanders to "**destrooy!**"

Fortunately for the unsuspecting populace, Ralph decides to postpone his rampage in lieu of a nap. Once again he finds himself in another patented, "Ralph Snart Fantasy Otherworld."

In this realm, Ralph has just purchased a "cheap" role-playing game "for only $59.95."

Ignoring the instructions, Ralph activates the game's "3-D holographic play mode" and is instantly transported into the world of "Blood N' Guts."

After teaming up with an alcoholic wizard, Ralph valiantly tries to abide by the rules of sword and sorcery gaming by searching for treasure and opposing supernatural threats, such as a giant slug. Swallowed by the gargantuan gastropod,

Ralph muses that, "This role-playing game is not all fun and games."

Escaping from a slimy fate, Ralph meets and is adopted by the fatally affectionate George The Dragon, whose behavior bears a startling resemblance to the huge Snowman in the Warner Brothers cartoon, **Abominable Snow Rabbit**.

Humiliated and stymied, Ralph has finally had enough role-playing. Jeered and mocked by the denizens of the game universe for his poor performance, Ralph returns to his tenuous dream-reality where he promptly flushes the "Blood N' Guts" box down the toilet.

At the beginning of issue three, an insane Ralph is embarking on a mindless campaign to "Maim! Amputate! Mutilate! and Tease!"

Dr. Groot (who looks similar to one of Popeye's goons) fears that the blame for Ralph's rampage will fall upon him. He recaptures Ralph who retreats from an intolerable reality into a twisted retelling of **Blade Runner**.

After being dragged out of bed by his short tempered slave droid ("Wake up, fathead!") and forced to eat a hearty breakfast consisting of "moldy corn flakes, a smattering of El Burno hotsauce" and other household toxins, Ralph introduces himself in the best Mickey Spillane manner:

"My name is Ralph Snart. I'm a robot exterminator. I rid this fair city of the mechanical slime that've gone bad!"

MUZZLING 871

Assigned to locate and deactivate army attack robot 871 that is operating on its original program, Ralph pays a visit to his devoted girlfriend to inform her of his latest mission. She begs him to go after the "big, bad robot" and to "settle down, raise a-"

Hard-boiled Ralph interrupts with a heartless, "Get real, bitch."

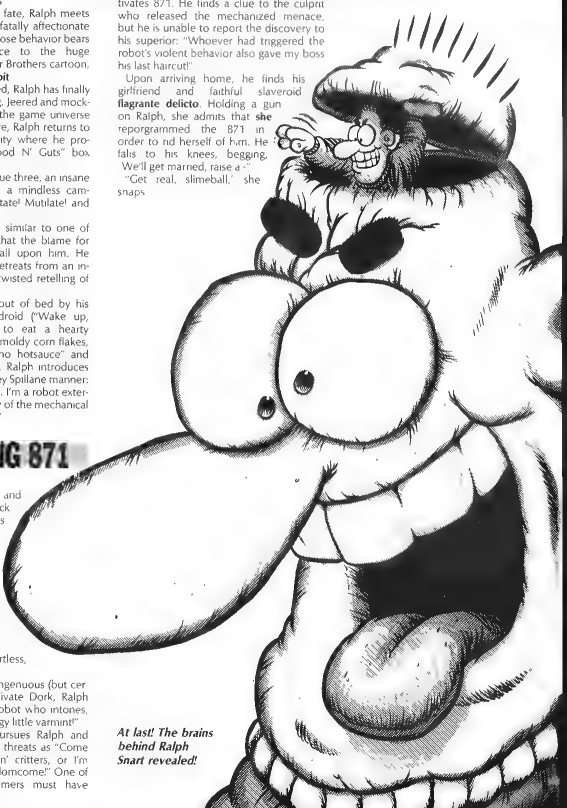
Accompanied by the ingenuous (but certainly not **ingenious**) Private Dork, Ralph tracks down the killer robot who intones, "Say yer prayers, ya mangy little varmint!"

The giant machine pursues Ralph and Dork, uttering such dire threats as "Come back here, ya fur-bearin' critters, or I'm agonna blast ya tuh kindomcome!" One of 871's original programmers must have been Mel Blanc.

Using Dork as bait, Ralph traps and deactivates 871. He finds a clue to the culprit who released the mechanized menace, but he is unable to report the discovery to his superior: "Whoever had triggered the robot's violent behavior also gave my boss his last haircut!"

Upon arriving home, he finds his girlfriend and faithful slaveroid **flagrante delicto**. Holding a gun on Ralph, she admits that **she** reprogrammed the 871 in order to rid herself of him. He fails to his knees, begging, "We'll get married, raise a-"

"Get real, slimeball," she snaps.



At last! The brains behind Ralph Snart revealed!

copyright 1987 Marc Hansen

Of course the Ralph she shoots is only a robot double. After dispatching his girlfriend, Ralph awakens in the clutches of Dr. Groot who puts an end to his fantasizing by the simple expediency of removing his brain.

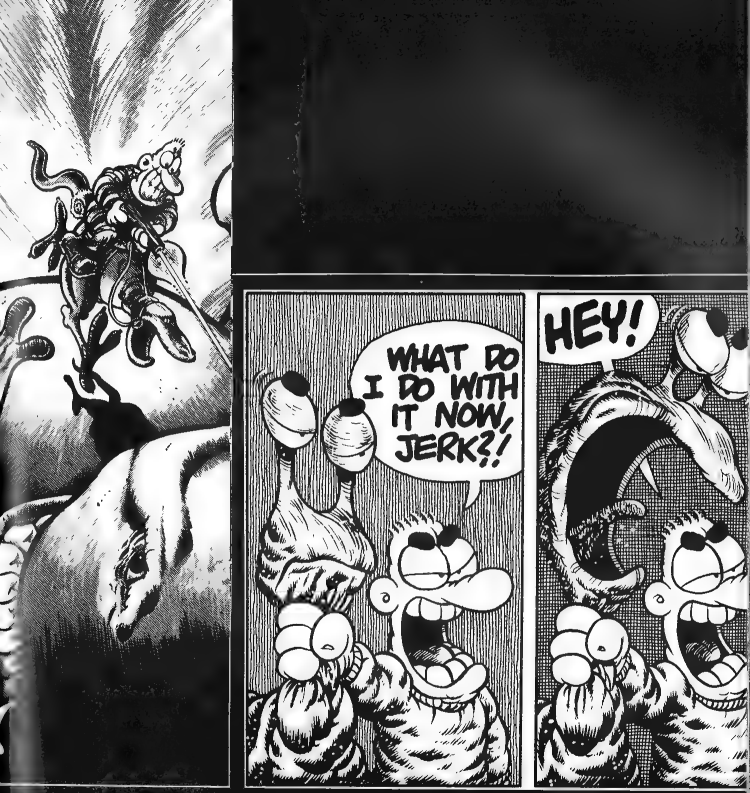
These stories are not simple parodies of currently popular trends. **Ralph Snart Adventures** provoke laughter, true enough, but they also spark a sinking sensation of recognition.

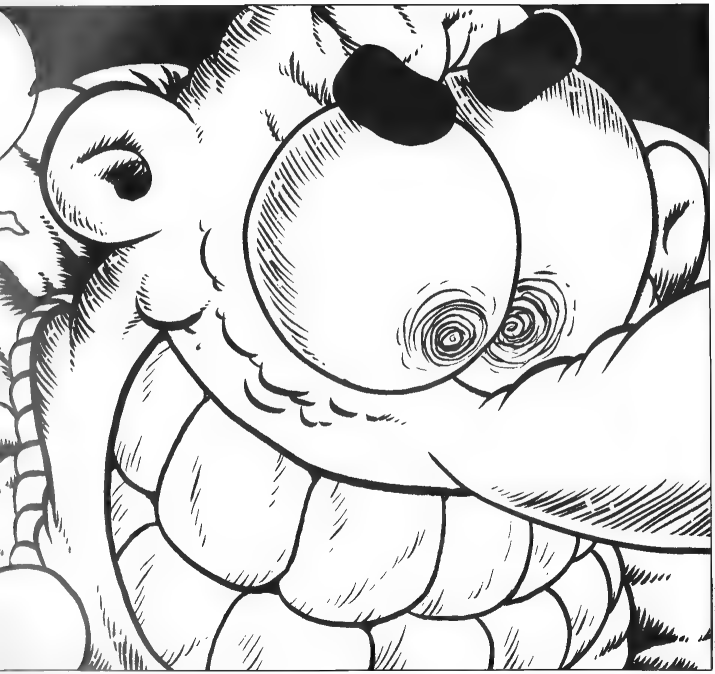
Who, after being gulled by dozens of "first issue collector's items" **hasn't** questioned the level of their maturity?

Who, after squandering a small fortune on role-playing paraphernalia **hasn't** wondered about their business sense?

Who, after hearing pompous, self-styled fan critics pontificating about the heavy weight meaning of **Blade Runner**, **Brazil** or what-have-you **hasn't** wondered if they all saw the same movie?

Ralph, as a character, is certainly unique in these particular stories. Possessing the ability to escape from a cold and dangerous reality into absurd and frustrating dreamscapes must rank as one of the most **pointless** super powers in all of comics history. He's not quite victimized by his dreams, but he's certainly not in total control of them, either. He is superficially similar to the protagonist of Ursula K. LeGuin's novel, **The Lathe of Heaven**, but he refuses to allow his fantasies to be manipulated by outside forces. Of course, he gets fed up with the permutations of his own imagination and simply quits the dream when his irritation threshold is reached.


WHAT DO I DO WITH IT NOW, JERK?!
HEY!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"Ralph Snart is not trying to be funny, it is funny."

SNART'S FUTURE

In any event, Marc Hansen intends to broaden the satirical perspective of **Ralph Snart Adventures** beyond mocking dearly-held fannish conventions: "It will be gradually changing. In #4, the humor will be different, something non-fans can relate to. I set the book up **not** to be constrained by any limitations."

Caputo perceives a bright future for **Ralph Snart Adventures**. Wanting to get as far away as possible from the stigma attached to underground comix, he declares that "Ralph will be going to color with number eight for that reason." A plan for newsstand distribution is also in the works, he adds, "hopefully by summertime."

He feels, after speaking with distributors such as Bud Plant, that "the next big trend will be humor comics,and Ralph will draw in people who don't even necessarily read comics."

Caputo admits, however, to some uncertainty as to the primary reading audience of Ralph's adventures: "I wish I knew. We've gotten letters from ten-year-olds using Crayolas to professional people using word processors. I guess the main audience is between ten and ninety."

He goes on to indicate that almost all of the credit for Ralph's popularity goes to Hansen: "He's one of the best people to work with. He's very shy, but really professional. He's two issues ahead of schedule all the time and he always comes up with great ideas for ads."

Caputo states unequivocally that the series is a success for a very simple reason. "**Ralph Snart** is not trying to be funny. It **is** funny."

F
C

Duke of Lowe Radio Host and Mike Bates by Brent Newsom

30 QUESTIONS

MIKE BARON

For the past few years, DC Comics has been in the process of revitalizing their flagship heroes. First Batman, then Superman, then Wonder Woman. Now the Flash has become the latest hero to undergo a facelift. DC has found it possible to breath new life into established characters, even if these characters are fifty years old. One of the ways they have done this is by hiring fresh young talent to guide the lives of their heroes

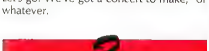
When the time came to update the Flash, editor Mike Gold went to Wisconsin native Mike Baron, who has a reputation as one of the hippest writers in comics. Baron is also regarded as one of the best writers at the independent publishers. He's made quite a name for himself at First Comics and, additionally, is now doing his first regular series for Marvel and DC.

Gold added Jackson Guice as artist and the new Flash creative team was complete. Baron slowed down long enough to tell **Four Color** where he sees the Flash going and how long he thinks it will take him to get there

FOUR COLOR: How is the new Flash different from the original series?

BARON: Well, the characterization is going to be a lot more contemporary and the stories are going to be a lot more realistic- given the fact that it's a bit of a heroic fantasy.

I felt an affinity for the character immediately. I identify with him because I know the type of person he is. He's a little like me, in that he's always sitting on the edge of his seat. He's very impatient. He's always saying, "Come on, what's the delay? Let's go. We've got a concert to make," or whatever.



FOUR COLOR: What do you mean when you say the stories will be more realistic?

BARON: One of the things we've done, in dealing with his power, is tried to show the cost in energy. He just can't go running off at the speed of sound all day and not pay for it. He has to eat enorrnous quantities of food, carbohydrates in particular. He drinks huge amounts. And when he really exerts himself, he'll end up sleeping for 16 hours at a stretch.

FOUR COLOR: How is Wally West, the new Flash, different from his predecessor Barry Allen?

BARON: I think Wally's a lot more cynical, especially in light of what happened to Barry. He's imbued with the sense of the same altruistic mission: He has these powers, he should help people. That's one thing that he prizes above all – what Barry taught him.

But at the same time, he's aware that if he opens himself up to all the people who could use his help, or think they could use his help, he'd have no life. So he has to pick and choose carefully and he's always concerned about his image, especially since he's twenty years old. He's much more self-conscious than an older person would be – than Barry, for instance.

FOUR COLOR: Will you be dealing with realistic situations that a twenty-year-old might find himself in?

BARON: Some of them. Quite a few social situations, romantic interludes – they're going to get very complicated because he's always rushing in where angels fear to tread.

FOUR COLOR: Will there be a steady girlfriend for Wally West?

BARON: I have introduced a number of women in his life, one of whom, I think, is playing a larger role than the others. She's Tina McGee, a nutritionist/scientist who meets him when they come together in the Utah desert to do a speed test. She's going to study his nutritional needs and see if she can help.

FOUR COLOR: Will sex play a role in Wally West's life?

BARON: A lot of sex! They don't call him "the Flash" for nothing! No, I shouldn't say that. That's one of the things we'll be coming back to later on this year.

There's this **Millenium** series that Steve Englehart is writing in which the Flash is called upon to rescue Gregorio, a prisoner in South America who happens to be gay. And the Flash is real uptight with this guy, because he keeps putting his hand on the Flash's ass and saying, "My, what a lovely costume." So the Flash is going to be a little upset.

FOUR COLOR: Is this a fill-in issue of **The Flash** that Englehart is writing?

BARON: He's writing **Millenium** as a miniseries and the Flash is going to appear in that. Originally Booster Gold was going to go after Gregorio, but Steve and I talked about it and figured the Flash would be better.

It seemed to fit Flash's character. Wally is aggressively heterosexual, possibly because he fears the latent homosexual feelings that most young men experience. Most of our readers should be able to relate to it. If not, they should seek counseling!

8

FOUR COLOR: Could you elaborate on that?

BARON: Well, I think that when you go through adolescence, there's a great deal of confusion about your sexual identity. Most young men — boys in America — are afraid of that confusion and, of course, want to be perceived by others as straight. So they over-compensate on the side of appearing straight.

I think Flash is a little bit like that, only not too bad. He's like most people you know who are at 15 to 25.

But Steve and I were talking about Gregorio and thought, "What super hero would be the most likely to elicit a reaction from Gregorio?" And we figured it was the Scarlet Speedster! He's got this bright red, skin tight outfit, nice buns . . . You can see the problem here. If you've ever been hit upon by a gay man, and you're not prepared to deal with it, it can be unnerving.

9

FOUR COLOR: So when you say that most of our readers should be able to identify with it. . . ?

BARON: Oh, I couldn't characterize who they are. I'm just joking. I'll tell you this, and I want you to get this absolutely straight: The readers of **Four Color Magazine** and **The Flash** are comfortable, well-adjusted, heterosexual male Americans. Their breath does not smell and their underarms do not stink. You can quote that exactly! I would say our readers are above suspicion. We're probably talking about the readers of other comics which we can't mention.

10

FOUR COLOR: Where do you see the Flash going in the next year?

BARON: Well he's going to Hong Kong! The **Flash** annual, which is completely written, pencilled and probably inked by now is the greatest story. I just can't get over it.

The Flash is in a Chinese restaurant that is being held up. He springs up out of his seat and whacks one guy, taking off after another one. And the third guy he doesn't really touch at all, just brushes by him, and the guy collapses.

The Flash just freaks out. He thinks he's responsible, but he doesn't know how. There's an old chef there who happens to be a master of the healing arts. He tells the Flash, "You just put the whammy on this guy with Dim Mak, the death touch." And Flash says, "What. . . ?!"

Dim Mak, the Death Touch — this is a real thing in martial arts, by the way, though I've never seen an example of it.

Anyway, he explains that masters of negative kung, or internal power, can summon their chi, or life-force, or whatever you want to call it and project it outside their body. In Dim Mak, the Death Touch, the master of negative chi brushes up against someone, transmitting his internal vibrations into them, and these vibrations work on the inside of your body. Within a week or a month you drop dead. It's a delayed death touch.

It could be a myth, it could be real. I've seen a lot of amazing things done that I never would have thought possible. But I've seen a lot of frauds, too.

So Flash says, "Jeez, I didn't mean to put the whammy on the guy. What am I going to do about it?" And the chef says, "I suggest you go to Hong Kong and consult the Wizened Sage. He's the only one who can help you. He's an ancient kung fu master in mainland China. He's a master of negative kung."

So it's kind of mysterious. The Flash says, "How do I find him?" and the chef answers, "Just ask for him."

The Flash goes to Hong Kong and there's this long adventure where he just kind of finds his way to the Wizened Sage. And when he discovers the Wizened Sage, who's 660 years old, he finds that he looks like a ten-year-old boy. The Flash gets involved with the Sage to teach him to bring forth his Dim Mak and control it. They begin training together and they both learn things from each other.

But there's a lot more to it than that. There's a love interest for the Flash. . . there's all his confused thoughts about a girl he left behind. . .

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FOUR COLOR: The girl he left behind, is that Tina McGee?

BARON: No, Tina doesn't appear in the annual. She's running in the main series. The girl he leaves behind is a Texas model, who leaves Flash with the impression of, "Oh whiny bitch! Jesus Christ! She doesn't know how to do anything! If I weren't there to hold her hand, she'd collapse!" He doesn't talk like that, I'm paraphrasing! Wally's much more restrained in his language.

But when he gets to China, the person he ultimately ends up fighting, and nearly getting killed by, is a woman. So that changes his concept of who they are and what they can do.

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FOUR COLOR: How about the overall direction of the comic? Where do you see that going?

BARON: Flash is going to find himself sucked into some interesting situations where he is pitted against things that are more than he can handle. He will constantly be stretched in every issue.

The third and fourth issues are devoted to a creature called Killg%re, that is an electromagnetic virus that infects the Earth and hates people. He can construct himself into a huge machine of war, which is how he first appears. Killg%re nearly wipes out everybody, the Flash included.

The Flash then begins an adventure concerning his love for Tina McGee. Her extremely jealous husband turns himself into a kind of monster using steroids and electronic implants and battles the Flash.

13

FOUR COLOR: Will the Flash continue to have a relationship with her?

BARON: Yes, it continues on into issue seven, at least.

14

FOUR COLOR: She's married, though?

BARON: She's married, but she's separated from her husband. He's a brilliant research scientist who went crazy. He becomes insanely jealous of the Flash when he finds out his wife has been carrying on with this twenty-year-old.

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FOUR COLOR: Is Wally West still a college student at this point?

BARON: No. In the first issue he wins four million dollars in the New York state lottery! And you just don't see him in college any more. But that's an interesting question. I'm glad you brought that up.

Four Color Interview: MIKE BARON

Little do readers know that Mike Baron harbors a secret inclination to be The Badger.

16

FOUR COLOR: So you intend to have Wally basically live off his winnings?

BARON: Definitely. It makes everything easier.

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FOUR COLOR: Will the money corrupt him?

BARON: No. I don't think money can corrupt a guy like Wally. When you can run at the speed of sound, having money is no big deal. I mean, which is a greater high, being the fastest man in the world, or being rich?

18

FOUR COLOR: Do you know anyone who's ever won that kind of money?

BARON: I knew a guy once who used to play the lottery every day. One time he won something like $250,000. The next week he was driving a brand new Lincoln and he was sponsoring rock shows. Well, the rock shows busted and he ended up back at his old job!

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FOUR COLOR: Does money change people?

BARON: Sure. It changes some for better, some for ill and some not at all. I think it will make Wally more gregarious. Money is the easiest way in life to have fun. I haven't really concentrated too much on Wally as the rich kid, although at the beginning of number two, you get a little look at the way he likes to spend his leisure hours, partying at fancy New York discos. He's the type of guy who Andy Warhol would want at all his parties. He's a super hero, he's a millionaire...

20

FOUR COLOR: Do you see elements of any other characters you write in the Flash? Specifically, someone like Judah Maccabee from **Nexus**?

BARON: No. I'm trying to keep the Flash pretty pure. He's a lot closer to my own personality than Nexus or Judah or any of the others.

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FOUR COLOR: What is your own personality?

BARON: Oh, I don't know... I just meant the impatience...the enthusiasm...

22

FOUR COLOR: If you were to put yourself in a comic book, what sort of

"Wally is aggressively heterosexual, possibly because he feels the latent homosexual feelings that most young men experience. Most of our readers should be able to relate to it."

"I don't think money can corrupt a guy like Wally. When you can run at the speed of sound, having money is no big deal. I mean, which is a greater high, being the fastest man in the world, or being rich?

And the Flash is real uptight with this guy, because he keeps putting his hand on the Flash's ass and saying, "My what a lovely costume."

character would you be?

BARON: Well, occasionally, artists put me in a comic book and I usually wind up being myself! I think I'd be Badger, because you have more of a choice there, with his split personalities

23

FOUR COLOR: Do you have the Badger's kind of craziness in you?

BARON: Not for a long time!

25

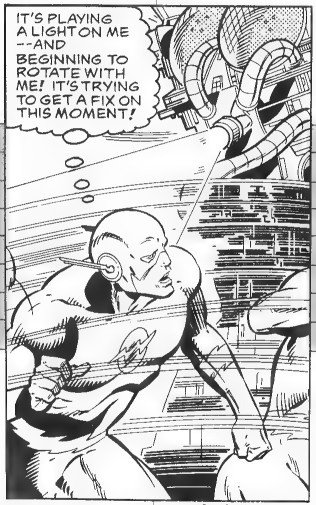
FOUR COLOR: Do you feel you'll have enough time for all these books? Or are you going to have to drop something?

BARON: I'm giving up polo!

26

FOUR COLOR: Do you try to devote one week a month to each book?

BARON: No, I do it by instinct, really. I write every day, that's six days a week. Some days I write two hours, other days I write 12 hours. It just depends on what I'm writing and how fascinated I am by what I'm writing.



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FOUR COLOR: At this point, unless I'm mistaken, you're writing five comics a month! **Nexus**, **Badger**, **Flash**, **Punisher** and **Corum**.

BARON: **Corum** is bi-monthly and so is **Punisher**.

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FOUR COLOR: So you don't see there as being a Mike Baron product that appeals to a specific type of person?

BARON: I would hope not. Except that I hope people seek out my writing because it pleases them. I'm really trying to write all this diverse material in comics right now. I admit that I've got a lot of characters running around in distinctive costumes, but that's because some of them were thrust upon me and some of them I put in costumes because I wanted to get them out.

But I'm also trying to do things like **Ginger Fox** and **Robotech** and **Corum.** In the case of **Corum,** an adaptation of something by Michael Moorcock, I am not using any of **my** words at all. Every word that appears in the comic, I try to take straight out of the book

28

FOUR COLOR: Where are you taking the Flash?

BARON: The Flash is going to be involved with life and death situations for the most part. There's going to be a lot of humor, a lot of speed razzle dazzle, but there are also going to be serious stories with serious melodrama.

29

FOUR COLOR: How about the life of Wally West? Where do you see that going?

BARON: Confusion, upheaval, love, dashed hope .

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FOUR COLOR: The works?

BARON: Right.

FC

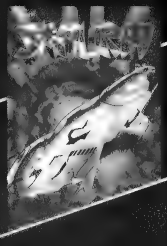
DO COMIC BOOK COVERS MAKE THE GRADE?

four color invited a noted graphic artist to critique the state of recent covers

When this article was first discussed it sounded literally, like child's play. Comic book covers, do they make the grade? Should be fairly straightforward, they either do or don't, right? Just take a large sampling from a well stocked comic book store, weed out the worst, decide which is obviously the best and choose representatives for a one-to-ten scale in degrees of bad to good. Unfortunately, it just isn't that simple!

The problem with the original request became evident immediately after I received the samples. There is no way you can take a pile of eighty to one hundred comic book covers (just a miniscule sampling of all that are available) and simply classify their 'faces' from one to ten. These graphics definitely fall into several distinct categories, one category not to be compared to the other any more than you would compare a Piper Cub with a Boeing 747. They're just **different**.

By Pat Shapiro



WATCHMEN
SECRET ORIGINS
NIGHTWING
by MESKIN & LARSEN
THE MURDER
WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE!
MORITURI
THE MAN OF STEEL
COMICO
GRENDEL
BATMAN
YEAR ONE PART 2
Alpha Flight
COMICO
MARTIAL ARTS
DONATELLO
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLE
No.3

These are the personalities I saw:

1. Good masthead ruined by other defects
2. Creatively unusual
3. Bold graphic statements using a limited selection of colors
4. Flights of fantasy
5. The 'cute' or 'cartoony' look associated with kids' comics, but not necessarily what they actually **are**
6. Bold graphic statements using a variety of colors
7. Exquisite illustrations, usually distinguished by the classic comic outline

For some inexplicable reason, a large portion of the covers suffered from some type of design and/or overkill problem so as not to do their job properly. Now, in all honesty, this observation may not be completely fair, since art is art and AS art, is the job in **itself**. However, it was difficult to discount the fact that the cover is a commercial piece and exists to sell the product. Mastheads, then, should be an integral part of the design. Some clearly were not. Clutter is another serious problem and was often caused by the artist's overly ambitious design. In other instances the fault is obviously with the publisher who simply tried to include too much information on the wrapper.

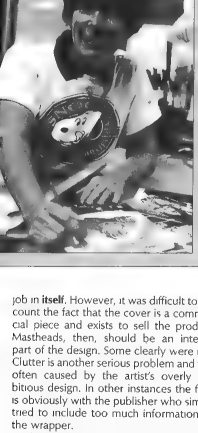
Subject matter is interesting to say the least and some of these illustrations are drawn so beautifully and colored with such sensitivity that you can't help but see beyond the strange protagonists and admire their originality, design and execution. On my favorite covers, the artists have outdone themselves. It's a shame that they have no control over the everpresent logo, price and other bullets plus copy that distract from their layouts.

Common design faults were:

1. Too many small items vying for attention at the top of the page, ie: Ostentatious brand identification, price and volume/date boxes, and hints of other goodies to be found inside
2. Masthead lost in the layout, either because of size, lack of color contrast or weakness of typestyle
3. Masthead good but too many other images squeezed into the format, sometimes behind or partially obscuring the title, making the total look confusing and unattractive
4. The worst were products of indecision having NO **dominant** element but including an excessive number of images and colors, thereby causing each individual unit to be small and unimportant. The resultant jumbled page makes no particular point

Here are some examples of the **very worst**: **Secret Origins**, a DC Comic that has given split billing to Nightwing and Jonny Thunder, uses five different type faces within the first two-and-a-half inches, plus the DC logo, price box and Comics Code approval box. The figures are trivial and too much is happening. **Boffo Laughs**, from Paragraphics, makes its claim to fame for being the first 'Holo' comic. It **does** have a square of holographic material on its cover, but the hologram is very poorly done, actually not a true hologram at all, and is lost in a maze of frantic minidrawings. Here again there are too many things going on. Definitely "committee"-type art. Also, neither has any particular color scheme, which exacerbates the discord.

Marvel Comics is the chief offender of the overly busy cover. In almost every example, the covers were so crowded with small elements as to be completely forgettable **Strikeforce: Morituri** and **Alpha Flight** illustrate the worst and the best (in that order) of the Marvels I was given. Most Marvels, lamentably, were clones of **Strikeforce: M**. After so many bad examples, the unexpected was **Alpha**, which is quite good except for the everpresent three by one-and a-quarter inch box at the top left to spoil the design.



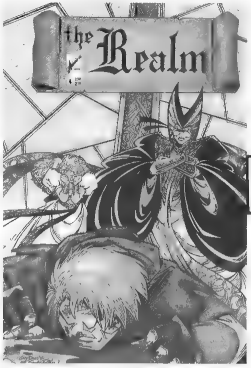
Pat Shapiro is the president of the Pat Shapiro Design Studios in New Jersey. She is one of the most in demand graphic artists on the east coast.

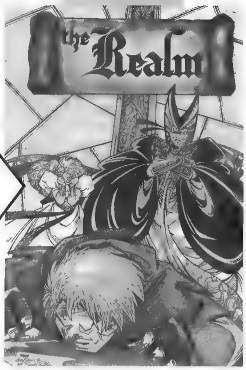
MASTHEADS BATTLE

Alien Legion and **Man of Steel**, had a lot going for them in the way of mastheads. The **Alien** logo is notably classy and the fiery rendering of the sun behind it is an outstanding foil for the warriors who are bathed in an eerie greenish glow. Unfortunately, Epic Comics fell into the trap of including too much. The unnecessary foreground figures introduce two more colors (light blue and reddish-purple) thus diluting the impact. The info box at the top left finished it off. DC has done the masthead for **Man of Steel** in shadowed metallic silver. It is strong and effective, especially with the chest of Superman dominating the page. If only they would have put all that other junk on the bottom.

I'd like to point out that some of the most offensive covers **were** so, because of irreverent use of poorly related and/or extraneous colors. Reviewing these BAD examples reproduced here in black and white in this article makes them appear better than they look in full color. This is because the error is largely diminished by a monochromatic photo that reduces the colors to one common denominator, grey, effectively masking the full impact of the discordant hues. Conversely, you will have to gear up your imagination regarding the examples cited for their color beauty, since the b&w photo can't show their vibrance. Color in fine art, graphic design, photography, costume or set design or any of the arts, used properly, is an integral **part** of the design and as such, an enhancement meticulously chosen and distributed.

At right, two examples of how flawed-over designs could be improved to strengthen pictoral presentations.


the Realm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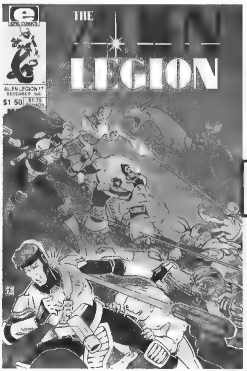

THE
LEGION
$1.50

ALIEN
LEGION

UNUSUAL

Elementals by Comico was unique in that it was the only cover that used a photograph, a black and white one at that, and then employed a collage technique by adding a flesh colored photo of a hand with a broad magenta line around it. Very attention-getting in this world of garish multicolored offerings. Though the masthead's style and color choice of white worked well with the photo, it was forced to compete with the aqua Comico grid and circle brand indent across the top, as well as the price square, therefore ending up too small.

VERY BOLD

Solson Publications' **Donatello, The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle** reminds me of the winner of the poster contest in grade school. Though admittedly simplistic, it has all the elements of a good graphic. Units carefully located, illustration well executed, plenty of contrast using limited colors (border black, masthead light green, figure two shades of green on white). Solson also had the intelligent humility to put their logo block at the bottom, thus eliminating design clutter. Target comics' **The Midnite Skulker** also fell into this category. The red background with black silhouettes highlighted with yellow are very effective. The masthead might have been bolder, but collectively it's a well balanced design.

Other successfully examples of limited use of color were **The Spirit**, **The Question**, **This Is Sold-Out**, and **Shuriken**, powerful in their simplicity.

FANTASY

Three most representative of this category were First Comics' **The Chronicles of Corum**, Apple Comics' **Unicorn Isle**, and Arrow Comics' **The Realm**. These are delightful to behold and appear to exist in the Camelot era. Lavish with interesting details, the colors are delicate and they are illustrations rather than cartoons. **Corum** would be almost perfect if "Michael Moorcock's the Chronicles of" was smaller and the First logo along with the price moved to the bottom. **Unicorn Isle** is marred by all the logos (WARP, Apple and "New Publisher" bullet) plus the price inside the illustration. **Realm** is fairly clean except for the Arrow logo up on the scroll-shaped masthead, but the typeface itself is too weak.

CARTOONY

"Cartoony" looking covers (usually animals rather than humanoid super heroes), sometimes are, sometimes aren't meant for kids. Disney's style never ceases to look innocent and uncluttered, as in **Walt Disney Comics & Stories** from Gladstone Publishing. **Nervous Rex** and **Tales of the Jackalope** from Blackthorne Publishing would both be striking examples of pure cartoon-style art if they hadn't been corrupted by the oversized "ribbon" logo, top left. I wasn't ecstatic over the cover of Dark Horse Comics' **Boris The Bear**, but it's tough to ignore two big eyes staring over the top of all the other comics. Not what I'd call great art, but commercially, a very good gimmick. Get rid of the logo block (yet again) and it wouldn't be half bad. **The Fish Police** from Fishwrap Productions is simple, poster-like and colored very nicely. A powerful illustration, however weird. One problem is the fancy thick and thin letters of the masthead which make it difficult to read.

BOLD AND COLORFUL

Despite a valiant attempt to narrow the next category down to two or three, I still came out with with seven bold and colorful graphic covers that deserve an A-minus. You can clearly see that the designs are powerful and distinctive. What you cannot see are the dramatic colors. **Batman**, from DC, uses black, pale yellow and shades of purple fading to dark blue. Contrasts plus strong graphic elements are what make this one a winner. **Anything Goes**, from Fantagraphics, has a completely black background, yellow-gold masthead and a marvelously evil character dashingly portrayed in blue-greys and red accentuated with white sparkles. Love it. . . I only wish the list on the top right would disappear. The lady glowering at you from the cover of Harrier Comics' **Redfox** is far from beautiful, as I'm sure was intended. However, the stark blackness of the side panels contrasting with the warm tones of the figure sandwiched between plus the perfectly proportioned masthead makes this layout exceptional. Naturally, I wish the price box was on the bottom. **Cerebus**, by Aardvark-Vanaheim has a really neat cover. It's a true dichotomy – a stark pen and ink drawing (note the crosshatching) and a delicate watercolor – soft clouds, tough character, making the total more than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, that Cerebus is one slick-looking dude. Comico's **Gvendel** cover is explosive! It is perfectly balanced. The masthead is exactly the right size and the vivid colors range from yellow-orange through yellow-gold to purple, with strong accents of pure black. Very emphatic. Aircel has a great one here with **Samurai**. Everything works – the glowing colors (reds, oranges and yellows), the single well-rendered spaceship and the dramatic masthead. Their unobtrusive brand ident is very acceptable, even placed at the top. Excellent.

Last but not least for this category is **Watchmen** from DC. Not only are the illustration and the color combinations exciting (tawny oranges, golds and yellows plus bright pink), but this was the only cover of all the samples to run its masthead up the side of the page. The pink type of the solid black vertical band is an intrepid and innovative departure in layout. It's a risky move because you can't read the whole name when the book is on the racks, but what a powerful design tactic!

AND THE WINNERS ARE. . .

Now for the highest honors, those covers that are graced with magnificent illustrations, exhibiting the sensitivity of line color I mentioned earlier. **Rip In Time**, published by Fantagor Press virtually glows with its flaming volcanic background, backlighting and exquisitely rendered subjects. Every color is vibrant, appropriate and radiates the excitement of the design. The masthead is perfect both in scale and coloration, and the only criticism here is the everpresent brand ident, price bullet and intruding copy, in this case, the names of the writer and artist. However, Richard Corben's illustration is so masterful he deserves to have his name anywhere he pleases.

Starkfuture from Aircel Publishing and illustrated by Jim Someville is another beauty. It is fun to speculate as to which mediums he employed. My guess is a combination of markers, pastels, pencils and airbrush, giving a very unusual textural appearance. The colors are mostly cool except for the fleshtones of the faces and the red outline around the masthead, which attractively accentuates those areas. Congratulations to Aircel for using only one small color-coordinated box for their volume number, price and brand ident inclusively. I respectfully suggest that their handsome new masthead might be improved with a slightly bolder outline.

Adventurers, from Adventure Publications, cover by Peter Hsu, fought for recognition in my "Fantasy" category too

The colors are soft, the background is misty and the finished piece is more a painting than an illustration. Unfortunately, the masthead falls short, being slightly wimpy for bold adventures! This plus the intruding white brand ident and price boxes degrade an otherwise excellent work of art.

Covers run the full gamut, from striking, like Rip In Time to cartoony, like Walt Disney Comics and Stories.

Wordsmith, from Renegade Press and illustrated by R.G. Taylor, is a sensitive illustration/painting/graphic. The bordered and ruled layout, plus the limited use of colors (mostly cool blues inside the border, warm blue outside) with the magenta-red border rules and masthead is outstanding. Renegade colored their unusually small logo to match, which makes it inoffensive although prominently located. Except for the white date and price boxes, which I wish were not so obvious, the only change I could suggest is a **slightly** larger or bolder masthead. Well done!

ADDRESSING THE COVER QUESTION

So, in (lengthy) answer to the question, "Comic book covers, do they make the grade?", I would have to say, yes. There are a profusion that are spectacular. The subject matter is hardly what the average person thinks of when he reflects on art, but that doesn't matter. However, as with the little girl in the nursery rhyme, when they are good, they are very, very good but when they are bad, they are horrid.

The author wishes to thank Dennis E. Frank and Charles F. Cascone of The Comic Book Emporium in Union, New Jersey for their cooperation in loaning one copy of every new comic they had on sale in January.

FC

in review

Welcome to the "In Review" section of **Four Color Magazine.** We'd like to take a moment and explain our reviewing policies. Titles reviewed are chosen by our regular review staff from those available at direct sales outlets. Publishers wishing to submit advance copies of titles should send them to the editor-in-chief of **Four Color.** Advance copies must include the cover for reproduction. Submitted issues are randomly assigned to reviewers.

Four Color invites readers to submit their opinions of titles reviewed and matters addressed in this section. Essentially, **your** opinions of **our** opinions will make up a dialogue page that will be enjoyed by fellow readers and professionals in the comic book industry.

Ten Minutes Of Bond

I hate reviewing first issues. Sometimes it's not so bad, especially if one has a frame of reference for the main character(s). Mike Baron breathes new life into the very concept of super speed in **The Flash** #1. **Justice League** #1 is a vast improvement over the last days of the **Justice League of America.** But then, it would have to be, wouldn't it?). That sort of thing, y'know?

Other times, you're just looking for a hook and trying to avoid the usual "good concept, let's see how it develops from here" line. Assuming you **like** the book, of course

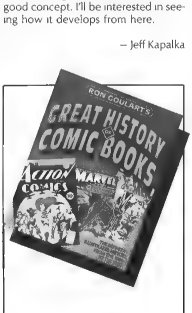
I like **Hero Sandwich** #1, the latest book to come out of Slave Labor Graphics, even though I'm not quite sure what it's all about. This first issue is like the first ten minutes of a James Bond picture. Lots of action, some humor and the barest introduction to the characters as you can manage. From this issue I gather that the focus is on a group of "heroes for hire," some of which have super powers. The only full name mentioned is the Silver Scorpion, "world reknowned thief . . . and all-around jerk," and **he** reminds me more of a cross between Indiana Jones and the Spirit than your standard super-guy (Must be the hat). There's a guy named Richard, "**very** MTV," who's the only person who's actually demonstrated any powers so far (he's a scaled-down Plastic Man type), two women, Rachel, and Lee Flea, a man with a 3-D smile button for a head, who is a kamakazi driver. They spend most of this issue recovering a secret formula and then vampires start popping up.

Confusing? You bet, but only in retrospect. The book carries itself along with such sheer enthusiasm that it doesn't occur to you to ask questions until you realize that the book's over.

I have no idea who wrote this, as the credits read, "Brains – Dan Vado; Brawn – Ed Savage; Sensitivity – Erin Wise; Inspiration – Michelle Vado/Martha Williams and Manual Dexterity – Chuck Beckum." I'm guessing that Dan Vado's the author as he's listed as co-copyright owner. I **can** say that Chuck Beckum drew it (It pays to sign your work). Some of you out there might remember Beckum as the first American artist to tackle **Miracleman** over at Eclipse. I don't know if he was just uncomfortable with super-folk in skin-tight suits (the characters in **Hero Sandwich** are all in street clothes), or if he made a quantum leap in his drawing ability, but **Sandwich** looks a lot better than **Miracleman.** Dynamic. Exciting. Funny. **And** showing a bit of that Japanese influence that seems to be the rage these days. I'm impressed.

I just wish that there was more **to** this issue to go on. As it stands, it looks like a good creative team and a good concept. I'll be interested in seeing how it develops from here.

– Jeff Kapalka



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ECLIPSE COMICS

Ron Goulart's **Great History of Comic Books** ($14.95, Contemporary Books) will, I suspect, become a primary source of comics history for the current generation of fans. While the book is enjoyable, however, it is neither great nor definitive, as its cover proclaims.

On the plus side, the light, pleasant writing style which has characterized Goulart's work in the fan press throughout the years makes for lively reading, and liberally scattered black-and-white illustrations, many heretofore unseen in publications of this sort, provide a visual delight. I, for one, learned lots of new trivia tidbits, even though I considered my own knowledge of comics lore to be fairly extensive.

That knowledge was gleaned from many of the long-out-of-print books that educated my own generation of fans, including Feiffer's **The Great Comic Book Heroes**, Steranko's first (and only) two volumes of the **History of Comics, All in Color for a Dime**, Stan Lee's **Origins of Marvel Comics** series and others, as well as more recent works like **Fifty Who Made DC Great** and even various New Media publications written and edited by Goulart himself. The **Great History of Comic Books,** while it does contribute much new information to the knowledge collection of fandom at large, unfortunately also contains many anecdotes and accounts originally presented in the earlier works noted above. At very least, a reference list should have been included, to give some measure of credit where credit is due. Even more appropriate would have been footnotes and a full bibliography.

In direct contrast to the excellent collection of black-and-white illustrations previously noted, the color sections of the book leave a great deal to be desired. The Golden Age is represented by rather bland choices of cover and interior page reproductions, with some exceptions including a Sheldon Mayer "Scribbly" page and a bit of early Basil Wolverton work. The "modern day" color section consists solely of Marvel samples and rather odd ones, at that. I can't imagine why cover reproductions of 1970s reprint books like **Where Monsters Dwell** and **Kid Colt** are included as opposed to at least, the vintage originals or at best, major titles like **Fantastic Four** or **Avengers.**

On the subject of modern day comics, the **Great History of Comic Books** covers the period from 1960 forward only cursorily, again rendering its own cover copy ("The Definitive Illustrated History from the 1890s to the 1980s") less than accurate. Actually, the period from the turn of the century through the 1920s gets roughly one paragraph, with only 33 pages devoted to the "modern" period of 1960-1985 at the other end of the continuum, leaving the great majority of this thick tome's pages (274) for the years 1922-1959. This unbalanced view of the history of comics is disconcerting. Actually, I was left with the feeling that the book was rather rushed toward the end. If, however, one were to place Goulart's book side-by-side with **The Comic Book Heroes,** the excellent history of the "Silver Age" by Jacobs and Jones, a rather comprehensive history of the comics would be had.

Despite the flaws noted above, the **Great History of Comic Books** is a fairly complete reference work for the pre-1960 period and as such, provides a good amount of otherwise unavailable information to a new generation of afficionadoes. For anyone interested in learning more about both the contents and the creators of the four-color world, the **Great History of Comic Books** will provide a few hours of fun reading and a lasting addition to your comics library.

– Joseph J. Cicala

Happy Anniversary, Grimjack

WARNING! The review you are about to read will reveal important plot information from **Grimjack** #36. If you don't like to have endings spoiled for you, stop here, read the book (it's good), and rejoin us later.

Still with us? Well, it's on your own head, then.

Grimjack #36 is John Gaunt's third anniversary issue and to celebrate, the friendly folk at First have decided to kill off a major character. "A **very** major character, indeed," said First's Sales Director Kurt Goldzung in the cover letter accompanying the review copy. "And he's really **very** dead."

As you'll recall from **Grimjack** #35, Mundens' Bar is in flames, Gordon and Bob are seriously injured and anything that gave Gaunt's life meaning has been torn away from him. Gaunt is not in a good mood. He's going to get the ones responsible, even if it costs him his own life. It does.

Now let me say right here that I was completely taken in, albeit in a roundabout fashion. I was set up! **Every** indication is given that it's going to be Gaunt that buys it. Everything, from the cover, featuring Gaunt with a big D.O.A. stamped across him, to lines like "Cheez Louise, this ain't like Gaunt. Acts like he don't **care.** Gonna get hisself **killed** walkin' around with that attitude," and "Huh. Seen **eyes** like that on men before. **Dead** men," scream out that Grimjack's going to get wasted. Obviously.

It's too easy. Gotta be someone else.

Nope, sorry. It's the old double-reverse and Gaunt gets himself snuffed in a graveyard, after stating "I've had enough."

It's a good thing that Goldzung's letter went on to say that "**Grimjack** embarks on an entirely new direction beginning with this issue, one that we believe will result in a new vitality for the series," or I would have really been mad. This issue is one of the best Grimjack stories that have come out for some time. I had lost interest in the series some time ago, as the stories meandered through various quests and cases, marking time until the next issue.

But now, I'm psyched. John Ostrander's script makes Gaunt, in death, one heck of a lot more interesting than he had been for the past dozen and a half issues. We see Gaunt as a driven, relentless force of vengeance and as a man weary of death and destruction. I like him a lot better than the stoic enigma of issues

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past. I don't think that a little death is going to keep him down. It did wonders for the careers of Jim Corrigan and Boston Brand, not to mention Caunt's former ectoplasmic lover, Spook.

Also in this issue are brief glimpses of life in Cynosure. Things like the various fire departments showing up at Munden's Inferno and battling for the contract to put it out (I love that sort of stuff).

Finally, I can't say enough about Tom Mandrake's art. He sustains a nice, moody, comics noir atmosphere throughout (especially in the cemetery scenes). Hope Ken Fedurnewicz' colors do it justice (I'm reviewing from black and white photocopies, alas).

So, happy anniversary, Grimjack. Rest in peace? I doubt it.

-- Jeff Kapalka

Moore Fun Comics

Alan Moore.

Two words that gladden my heart as a reader and send me into a panic as a reviewer.

Alan Moore.

The guy is almost **too** good a writer. You see his name on a story and it's practically a guarantee that it's going to be worth reading. A trusted brand name, as it were, of excellence.

Titan Books has recognized this and has packaged their latest editions of "The Best of **2000 A.D.**" reprint albums as **Alan Moore's Shocking Futures** and **Alan Moore's Twisted Times.** Step back and think about this for a moment. Usually, collections like these are put together on the strength of a central character. Judge Dredd. Rogue Trooper. D.R. and Quinch. Halo Jones. It takes a lot of confidence in the marketability of Moore's name to come up with not one but **two** books whose selling point is that Alan Moore is the author

Alan Moore.

It's almost embarrassing.

I mean, here are two books which collect "Tharg's* Future Shocks," "Tharg's Time Twisters" and the saga of Abelard Snazz, the man with the double-decker brain. These are "filler" stories, tales to mark time between the adventures of Strontium Dog or Nemesis the Warlock, short (usually running two to six pages) vignettes that the editor can drop into a hole in the schedule and fill up an issue.

And they're just plain fun to read.

Since they are so short and slight, we see a lighter side of Moore than we see in **Swamp Thing** or **Miracleman.** No time for massive character development here. There's just six pages, tops, to introduce the characters, set up the situation and deliver the punchline! Sets of these books should be required reading to any superhero soap opera writer who can't conceive of writing a story less than three issues long. No names. You know who they are.

At this point, I'd like to list my favorite stories from the books -- but it'd be more simple to reprint the tables of contents. Still, mention must be made of "The English/Phlondrutian Phrasebook" ("Sphooze ghlot-bard es tuh-roo vul-yak." / "Those gentlemen are eating our luggage."), "The Last Rumble of the Platinum Horde" (with artist John Higgins doing "a sterling job in depicting the lighter side of genocide") "The Hyper Historical Headbang" (Moore and Alan Davis team to present the loudest heavy metal band in the Universe), "A Cautionary Fable" (one of two attempts Moore makes to become England's answer to Shel Silverstein) and "The Wages of Sin" ("We're looking for people who sincerely want to rule the Universe!"), all from **Futures.** Also, the wonderfully written "The Reversable Man," where the lead character lives a perfectly normal life...in reverse and the diabolically daffy "Chronocops!" with great Will Elder-style art by Dave Gibbons, both in **Times.**

And now, a confession of sorts. I always considered Moore's Abelard Snazz stories (collected in toto-almost in **Times**) to be a waste of time and space. Eventually, I took it as a point of pride that there did indeed exist stories by Alan Moore that I didn't like. Snazz is this four-eyed super genius, you see, and in each story he uses his "double decker dome" to come up with a fantastic solution to an improbable problem and then muck it up royally. Ho-hum, right? Well, after reading the Snazz saga in one sitting I've reluctantly come to the conclusion that they're not bad after all. Each story, complete in itself, builds on the one before, the situations getting more and more ludicrous, until the final punchline, making the entire series one long shaggy dog story. In his introduction to these tales (Moore gives a little bit of background to each story collected in these albums -- yet another reason to pick them up), Moore spends some time explaining the absence of the second Snazz story in the collection, as he realized, after the fact, that certain story points were unconciously "lifted" from the works of R.A. Laffer ty. Commendable integrity, I think. Continuity fans should note that the exclusion of this story does not interrupt the story's flow one whit. As a matter of fact, I had to check my back progs of **2000 A.D.** to convince myself that there **was** a story missing. They should also note that one of the Snazz stories ties into **three** stories in **Futures!**

And there you have it. Sure these are all gimmick stories, but they're entertaining gimmick stories, well told and drawn by some of the best artists working in British comics today.

Alan Moore

I wonder what would happen if we put his name on a breakfast cereal..

* Tharg, as everyone should know, is the host/editor of **2000 A.D.**, "the galaxy's greatest comic," quite possibly the only extraterrestrial host/editor on this planet at this time, and a zarjaz fellow in his own right.

- Jeff Kapalka

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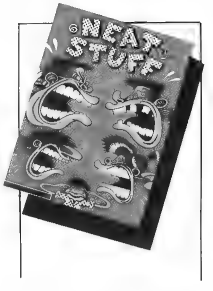


Hell's Bells, Bagge's Bradleys And Some Really Neat Stuff

Since there is currently no continuing all-Crumb title, and new issues of **The Freak Brothers** come out as often as blue moons anymore, and since only time will tell if **Reid Fleming's** new quarterly schedule is for a year or a decade, then I guess it's safe to say that Peter Bagge's Fantagraphics book **Neat Stuff** is **the** funniest comic title regularly being published these days. Even without the equivocations, it's safe to say that Bagge is currently in the upper echeleon of comics' best cartoonists. In a half-dozen issues, **Neat Stuff** has regularly delivered more genuine bellylaughs than any comics series since the good old days of the undergrounds, and the latest issue, #6, is even funnier than most

The newest edition of **Neat Stuff** shines brighter than usual primarily because it's the first issue devoted exclusively to The Bradleys, Bagge's own version of the American dream. For those not familiar with the family Bradley, they come across as Hell's answer to "Father Knows Best," or, as Bagge himself says in this issue's lettercol, "proof positive that the family that stays together **hates each other's guts!**" The Bradleys have provided many of **Neat Stuff's** best moments in the past (which is really saying something, given the book's other great continuing characters), and that's possibly because Bagge understands them the best While the family life depicted in his Bradleys stories is usually filled with outrageous (and often brilliant) scenes of cartoon violence and a detached satirizing of popular culture in general, there is a remarkable amount of real-life truth that cuts through the comic noise and buffoonery of the Bradley's bickering The results are often an almost **too** insightful look at American middle-class life.

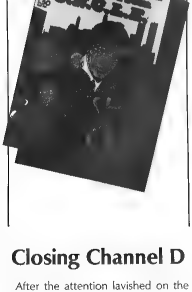
Neat Stuff #6 starts dispensing its brand of hilarious truth right away with its first story, "Brotherly Love " The power exchange between older and younger brothers has been one of Bagge's favorite themes in his Bradleys stories, but this piece may be the best one he's done yet on the subject. For the most part, the story is almost like an old Laurel and Hardy two-reeler (a very high compliment, I might add) where the two warring siblings engage in a deadly version of "Tit for Tat "

Because Bagge refuses to imbue his characters with any unrealistically **nice** qualities, the seething rage that Buddy and younger brother Butch feel toward each other and their subsequent loyal partnership when confronted by the true enemy, their parents–is almost palpably real, even when their warfare becomes out and-out cartoon farce. Besides the surface comedy, Bagge's characterizations of the individual Bradleys continue to deepen and there are some nice moments at the beginning of the story where the two brothers exchange **very** different philosophical and ideological viewpoints (Butch, for example, is a perfect caricature of a TV-loving pre-pubescent warmonger). The story is almost flawlessly paced and belongs in "The Best of Peter Bagge," whenever such a volume actually and deservedly appears.

While "Brotherly Love" is the best sustained story of the issue, the closing story "Mom Power" is even more ambitious and, possibly, even funnier. Bagge's admirable attempts to make The Bradleys funny without being lovable bring about some great comedic moments here as the lady of the house finally flips out. Besides being possibly the funniest household in comics, Bagge's Bradleys may also be the **ugliest** and the cartooning work in this story is some of his finest. But despite the absurdity of some of the jokes, Bagge's depiction of poor Mom Bradley's no win situation as she deals with her ungrateful family is right on target, as is her brood's subsequent inability to figure out **whatever** could be wrong with Mother. The story ends awkwardly (Bagge still has a tendency to strive for a socko finish and too often they don't work), but the scenes of domestic unravelling that precede it are indeed some pretty neat stuff.

If you haven't already guessed, I think **Neat Stuff #6** is rather terrific, one of the best issues in an outstanding series. Possibly the one thing that comics can do better than any other medium is make us laugh and it's the one thing these days that they do far too seldom. Peter Bagge doesn't seem to know how to **not** be funny, something I'll be grateful for with every issue of his book. And if it's been awhile since a comic has made **you** laugh out loud, I'd recommend this latest megadose of Bradleys right away. It might even make your own family seem a little funnier, but I can't make any real promises on that score

–Steve Monaco



Closing Channel D

After the attention lavished on the new **Man From U.N.C.L.E.** comic in the News and Opinion section of **Four Color #2**, fans of the original series had high hopes for this publication. The original 1960s Gold Key **U.N.C.L.E.** comic may have been penned by hack writers but it had a distinct advantage over this new effort. TE Comic's **Man From U.N.C.L.E.** features embarrassingly pedestrian

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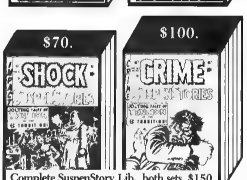

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artwork and a story that hardly makes the resurrection seem worthwhile.

The Man From U.N.C.L.E was ahead of its time in many ways, but it was hampered by the meager budgets of 60s television. A comic book, in which virtually anything is possible with the right artist at the helm, would be the perfect format for introducing elements **U.N.C.L.E.** was not able to put in film. For example, many of the aspects of U.N.C.L.E. and Thrush lore covered in the notes of creator Sam Rolfe but never used in the series could finally be presented in the pages of this new comic. Instead, writers Skip Simpson and David M. Lynch opt for a story that amounts to just a few flurries of pointless action, some typical 60s spy film cliches and a premise that smacks of **Get Smart.**

There is no narration in the **U.N.C.L.E** comic, which makes the story difficult to follow and robs it of that special "inner voice" that gives a comic depth and dimension. With some very trite dialogue (including a mesmerizingly insipid scene on board an U.N.C.L.E. jet) working against it, what this comic needs above all is a literate, articulate hand to guide its stories.

On the visual end, Ken Penders' drawings are curiously undeveloped. He shows a definite proficiency with inanimate objects but when given human beings his work turns shoddy and unintentionally amusing. The major complaint involved here is with his renderings of the main **U.N.C.L.E.** characters. His Napoleon Solo resembles Robert Vaughn in about every tenth panel and his Illya Kuryakin never once comes close to David McCallum. Considering the plethora of **U.N.C.L.E.** stills floating around America's memorabilia shops and the easy accessiblity of syndicated reruns, there is simply no excuse for this. It would not be so bad if Penders' Solo and Illya just resembled any pair of brown and blond haired men, but so often his faces are grotesque and cartoon-like.

For fans, TE Comics' **The Man From U.N.C.L.E.** will have a few redeeming features (such as some surprising but inconsistent spurts of technical detail) but it is largely unsatisfying. Perhaps it is this very angle that is part of the problem. Editor Paul Howley's notes at the back of the comic are fatally fannish and the approach of authors Simpson and Lynch seems to be that **U.N.C.L.E.** in comic form doesn't need to prove itself since **everyone** knows and loves Solo and Illya. This just isn't so. Comics and television are two separate forms and what worked in one may not be directly adaptable to another (e.g. the lack of narration). As it is, the new **U.N.C.L.E.** comic reads like a storyboard for an episode of the TV series, an episode that would assuredly have been canned.

—Howard Roark

Slow, Acquired Taste

Hugo Pratt has become one of those comics artists whose work has become critically exalted before it was ever made available to the general audience. Before I'd read my first **Corto Maltese** story, I had seen many comments in the comics press about the magnitude of his greatness. After having read volume three in NBM's current stories of **Maltese** reprints, I feel that Pratt's artwork is praiseworthy, but not overly so. Either the stories in this volume show Pratt at less than his finest or, more likely, appreciation of the artist and his character is very much a matter of personal taste.

I certainly don't question the taste of those championing Pratt's artwork, such as Frank Miller, who contributes a short but very well written introduction to this volume. After presenting a one paragraph on target critique of the derivativeness in so much of modern comics, Miller extols Pratt's uniqueness as a comics storyteller, one whose art and insight come from his own widely-travelled, well-lived life. All this **is** apparent from reading even one story and in comparison to the average TV-inspired comics work produced so often these days. **Corto Maltese** truly is a breath of fresh, exotic air.

My main criticism of Pratt's work is that I find a static, aloof quality in the stories here that limits my ability to participate in the drama. Pratt's artwork too often has a cool, distant feel in even the most intense sequences and his characters' faces seldom seem to express real, full-blooded emotion. His writing, too, is a bit too deliberate and low-key for my tastes, especially considering the violent and mystic themes he continually features in his work. My own enjoyment of Pratt's artistic ability--which, at best, is as good as Miller claims--is diminished by his detached authorial point of view.

A good example is the book's title story, "Voodoo For The President," that has its strongest sequence weakened by Pratt's arm's-length approach to his material. An explosive courtroom scene--a high point involving a long-dead judge, a voodoo bloodletting and a killing--is oddly downplayed, both in the writing and the artwork. While some of the stiffness in the story's dialogue may have to do with the English translation, the characters all sound flatly alike, from hero Corto Maltese to the natives. The characters are also drawn to look oddly subdued, considering their violent circumstances, and Pratt's penchant for talking heads doesn't make matters any better. The story is ironically summed up by its closing line: "I was thinking about this whole thing...seems a little strange."

Other stories in the volume have sequences with similar problems, although the stories also seem to get better as they go along, which indicates that **Corto Maltese** could also be a (very) slowly acquired taste. I am certainly not going to dispute Frank Miller's assessment of Pratt's artistic technique and I find much to admire in his artwork, such as his backgrounds and mise-en-scene. I also agree with Miller that Pratt is the kind of comics artist to be respected, "an authority on times and places beyond your own." But despite the deep talent behind the strip, Hugo Pratt's stories strike me as those told by someone whose involvement with the lives of his characters comes more from a detached observation than genuine, active interaction.

—Steve Monaco

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Babe In 3-D Land

Some people consider the addition of 3-D to existing comics to be just another sales gimmick. I don't. Although, the best way to showcase what the process is capable of is with art that was done specifically for 3-D enhancement. Depending on the style of the artist and the skill of the depth enhancer, some wonderful transformations can occur with work that's been around for decades. In Kit chen Sink's great 3-D **Spirit** book from last year, for example, there was a perfect blending between the state-of-the-art effects of today's depth processing and Will Eisner's original art, which was already close to three-dimensional by itself. The process seems to provide its most exciting effects when applied to work by artists whose work already displays a flamboyant, exaggerated visual sense.

This being the case, a 3-D version of Windsor McCay's **Little Nemo In Slumberland** would seem to be a sure winner. McKay is certainly one of the just-mentioned type of cartoonists, and the distorted, phantasmagorical world created in McCay's best work should, in theory, have worked perfectly with depth enhancement. But the new 3-D **Nemo** just published by Blackthorne is almost a total failure. It illustrates perfectly how the process, in order to work correctly, needs something more from its source artwork than merely style alone, no matter how grand that style may be.

The main reason for the artistic failure of Blackthorne's 3-D **Nemo** is precisely the one quality that must have made it seem a perfect idea to begin with, Windsor McCay's artwork. But while McKay's style is certainly imaginative and fantastic, it's also a very **flat** style, with virtually no three-dimensional aspect of its own. Because of this, the original artwork itself limits the amount of depth processing that can be added, never a good situation for any 3-D comic. To compound this problem, the depth work done for the Blackthorne book by Bob and Nancy Fritsch, while competent, falls short of the high level of artistry that 3-D wizard Ray Zone achieves with even mediocre source material. While Zone seems capable of several layers of depth with even relatively flat work, the extra-dimensional enhancement done in the **Nemo** book has, usually, no more than two or three layers in any one panel. To be fair, McCay's art may have been beyond even Zone's expertise, but the work done here plays it too safe, regardless of its limited art source.

If a lack of spectacular visual effects were the only flaw of Blackthorne's 3-D **Nemo**, the book might still have been an interesting experiment that didn't quite succeed. Unfortunately, the basic layout of the book is so uneven and unattractive that it can't even be recommended on that level. The opening page, for example, features a sequence that may be the best suited for depth enhancement of any in the book. For some reason, however, the entire page is reduced to a size where the panels are as small as today's comic strips, with word balloons so tiny that they're almost unreadable. Other sequences are almost as badly done, with most of them not nearly as well suited to the process as the first. As if this weren't unfortunate enough, the last panel of every sequence–the traditional shot of Little Nemo sitting up in bed after waking from his latest dream–is reproduced as a full-page splash panel. Since there is practically **no** visual difference in the look of these concluding panels (they're almost always the exact same pose), it almost appears that the same page is replicated several times throughout the book. It's also the strangest of choices for full page treatment, too, since these panels have virtually nothing in them for the 3-D process to enhance.

Little Nemo In Slumberland In 3-D is only recommendable for those collectors of this interesting sub-genre. While it's not an enjoyable comic to read, the **Nemo** book is definitely a curio, and considering the disappointing way this one came out, I can't imagine that there will be many more in the series to follow.

Steve Monaco

RANDOM REACTIONS

The Avengers #280 (Marvel)

Butler Edwin Jarvis narrates a quiet retrospective of his experiences with the Avengers. This history of the Assemblers from the point of view of the team's only supporting character should prove informative to newer readers and nostalgic for veterans. It is in no way dry or repetitive, as many of the scenes presented have either never been seen before or, at least, have never been seen from Jarvis' unique perspective.

Secret Origins #15

A fine gathering together of the various elements of Deadman's origin is overshadowed by a masterful retelling of the coming of his predecessor, The Spectre. Roy Thomas and Michael T. Gilbert recapture the spirit of the Golden Age (pun fully intended) without sacrificing modern standards of story and art. For one last look at the original Spectre, pick this one up!

The Flash #1 (DC)

While I am happy to see this venerable character get first-class treatment, and while this book is undeniably well-crafted, there is still something about it that does not quite set right with me. Perhaps it's the rather somber atmosphere which pervades this issue. In terms of storyline, characterization, dialogue and even coloring, this is a book set at twilight even though it stars the epitome of the early morning superhero. This contrast may prove

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interesting in the long run (no pun intended), so it's only fair to reserve judgement for a while. One thing really bothers me, though. Editor Mike Gold has stated that he challenged artist Jackson Guice to come up with a new way to portray a super-speedster and that Guice met that challenge. Might we assume that this challenge was made and met sometime after the first issue was completed?

Crossfire #18 (Eclipse)

I am very glad to see this book return to the racks. Mark Evanier's sharp storytelling combines with Dan Spiegle's crisp artwork to provide, as usual, an issue pleasing to both eye and ear. Spiegle's work reproduces so clearly in black-and-white that reading this book is much like, I imagine, perusing the original art. Like most of this duo's stories, this one involves realistic, slice-of-life characters in an exciting yet believable setting. And, wonder of wonders, we are treated to both a letters page AND three pages of Evanier's "Show Business" reminiscences. Well worth the two bucks.

Batman #408 (DC)

I must say that I am not especially excited by the beginning of Batman's "new adventures," and I now agree with DC's decision not to begin with a new numbering sequence. I see very little difference in tone or execution between this issue and the last few years' worth of Batman stories. In addition, I see very little need to change the histories of the two remaining Robin characters. Is this change merely for the sake of change, in order for The Batman to keep up with the rest of DC's flagship characters? I expect more from such talents as Denny O'Neil and Max Collins and hope for improvement soon.

Strange Tales #3 (Marvel)

Like the two issues before it, this is a sharp, well-designed package, from the appealing cover to the fine stories to the superior artwork to, even, the well-crafted lettering. I've always thought that Dr. Strange works best in shorter stories and, it now seems, so do Cloak and Dagger. I've found these recent stories to be much more captivating than the full-length solo titles that preceeded them. Much of the credit for this book, which is so eye-catching on the racks must go, I'm sure, to editor Carl Potts, a superior designer who even manages to make the letters page logos in his other titles look terrific.

T.H.U.N.D.E.R. #1 (Solson)

Yet another sub-par attempt to revive the fondly-remembered T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents series of the sixties. This issue's story is very difficult to follow, in terms of both words and pictures, and there is very little difference between the faces of the many characters, despite the editorial claim to the contrary. For now, the most interesting thing about this book may well be its potential for producing a new round of fan-press bickering and legal proceedings regarding who "owns" the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents.

– Joseph J. Cicala

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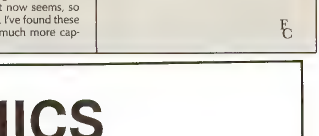

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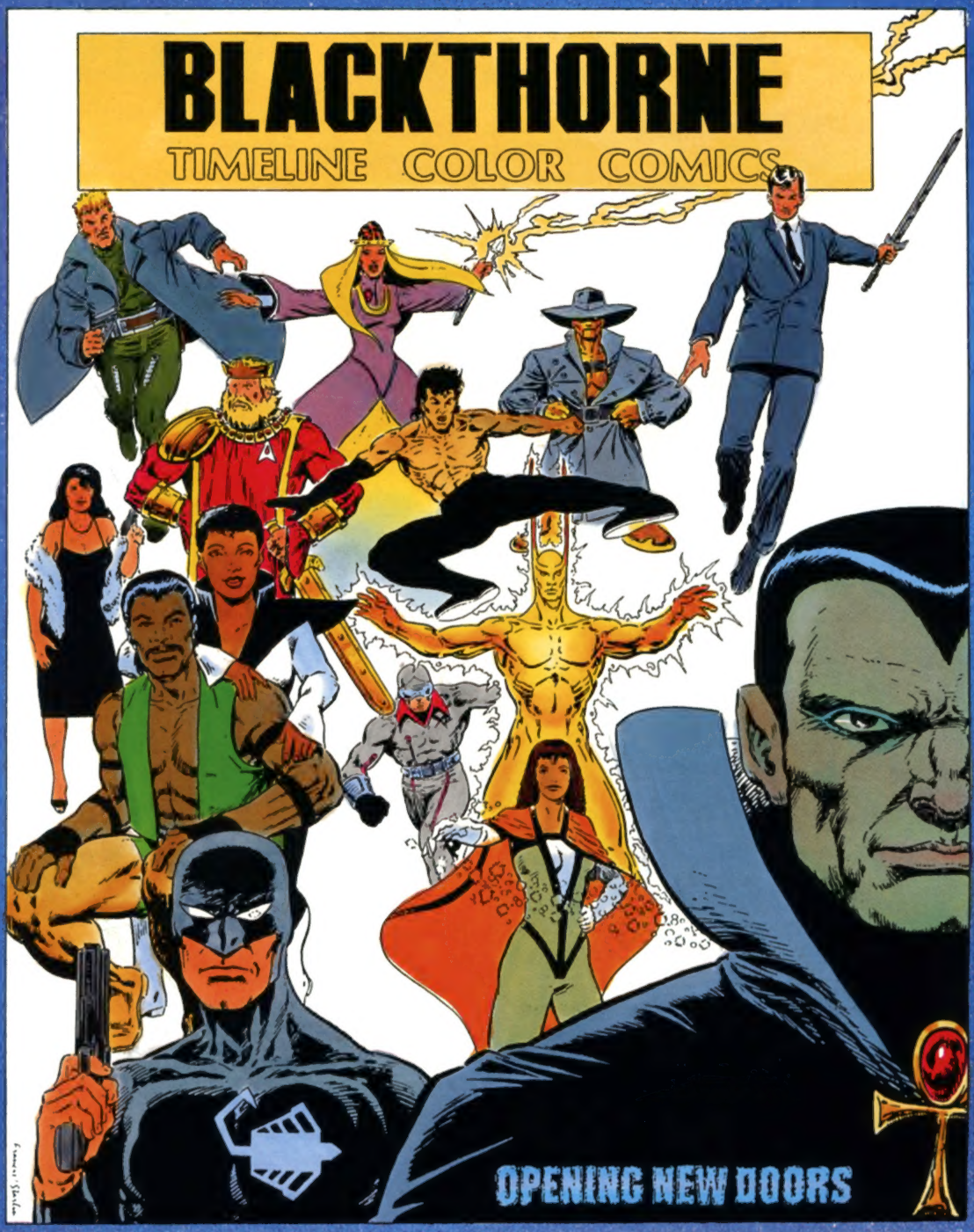

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